Kamigoroshi no Eiyuu to Nanatsu no Seiyaku

(神殺しの英雄と七つの誓約)

Volume 04

Umetane
(ウメ種)

Story Description:

Three years ago, to defeat the Demon God who was trying to destroy this world, thirteen braves are summoned from another world. Each of them had varied ages and gender. Each of them was bestowed with cheat like powers not normal in this world.

One asked for indomitable will against any adversity.

One asked for god-like magic power.

One asked for a power to heal everyone.

One asked for a power to cook foods that will bring smile to everyone.

And so forth, each of them conveyed their wish and were granted what they asked for so that they could complete their quest. They

then departed, on adventure to defeat the demon god. For two years, they journeyed together and survived many hardships in this world, through joy, sadness, and discord; they persevered and in the end brilliantly defeated the demon god, brought peace to this world and then decided to live there. Among those thirteen, is one man that hid his whereabouts and disappeared after defeating the Demon God, but everyone would say:

It is he, the center of the thirteen braves, who is far more heroic than others.

It is he, who valiantly stands on the foremost line, protecting the others behind him.

It is he, the strongest man that killed the demon god.

And it is he, the only one who is blessed and loved the most by the goddess.

Original Story can be found here: Link

Chapter 38: New Life

It was a cold place. A cold, silent, and lonely place. An empty, dark, and sad place.

At its centre, was me. Was I standing or sitting? What's up and what's down? I knew nothing.

Who am I?

I asked. But there was no answer. I couldn't even tell whether I asked that question out loud or did I simply think of it. I was simply there, in solitude.

I want to meet people. Anyone would do. Anything would do. I just want to meet someone. Inside this pitch black darkness, I kept on wishing that.

I want to meet.

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giii with a screeching death cry, the green scaled monster I cut down finally fell. A lizardman. Normally in fantasy games, it's usually a monster race we get to see a lot. A 2m tall body and limbs like that of a human, their body was covered in green scales and they still wore iron or leather armour above it. They also carried either swords or spear-like weapons as well.

Their physical abilities were incredible, possessing speed like that of a beast. Their weapons were dangerous but the true danger came from their tail attacks. At full strength, it could even smash through a rock.

Cutting down this lizardman, and while breathing out, I put my mithril sword back into its sheath. The sound of battle ended and the sound of the nearby river reached my ears. The well grown trees and the mountain stream brought in a cold breeze. It would be a perfect space for camping if not for the monsters. Even though we're close to the capital, the number of monsters was still large. And, maybe due to the effect of the huge battle that took place here 2 years ago, the monsters here are pretty

strong among the ones on the Imnesia continent. Even lizardmen had physical abilities far surpassing their brethren in rural areas. It's the same for other monsters like goblins as well. Even though, normally, monsters don't even come close to places like this where humans gather.

"As usual, your skill is incredible."

"I felt like I could die any moment though."(renji)

As I took on the one lizardman in one-on-one combat, Feirona, who was beside me dealt with the surrounding goblins and said that to me. His golden hair swayed in the wind, an incredibly handsome guy. This good looking elf, had the skills to take on 5 goblins without losing a single breath.

And from behind him, a beauty with honey-coloured hair and a silver haired, dog-eared beauty walked nearby. The silver haired girl didn't seem to be bothered by anything and but the other seemed to droop her shoulders a bit.

"What happened Miss Francesca?"(renji)

"Nothing, it's just....."

"By the time Francesca even thinks of using her magic, the battle is already over after all."

Ah, I see, so she's worried that she isn't being of any use. She doesn't really have to, to be honest. Well, since we're fighting together as a party after all. I guess she must be feeling inferior seeing that she wasn't able to contribute much to the party.

"The last goblin."(mururu)

"Hm?"(fran)

"You were able to destroy its balance. It helped me."(mururu)

"Uu.....Mururu-chan."(fran)

Feeling moved, Miss Francesca hugged her from behind. Due to the difference in their heights, Mururu's head was completely buried in Miss Francesca's chest. Well, it doesn't look as lewd as it sounds though.

Anyway, it does make it difficult for a guy like me to look at them directly though. Mururu, still had her uncaring face on her face as well.

Averting my gaze from them, I kneeled down near the lizardman's corpse. Cutting away the right hand from the wrist as proof of subjugation, I put it inside my bag. At the same time, I also picked up the single edged sword made from the bone of some animal as well. Since it looks like a rare type of sword, it might sell for quite the sum.

"They seem to be getting along quite more in the week I was away it seems."(renji)

"Well, they're both women after all. It was troubling for me, as the single guy, to be alone you know."(elf)

He said that but I don't think he was actually troubled much by it. His lips were loosened in a slight smile. Seriously, these guys have really started to get along each other in the past one week. How envious, really.

"I'll go wash my hands."(renji)

"Yeah, don't go off too far though."(elf)

Why am I being treated like a kid?

I left the area and went to wash my hands at the stream. The clear water was cold and made my finger joints hurt a bit. Frowning a little, I carefully washed away and removed the blood sticking to my hands.

"What happened? Why so quiet today?"(renji)

[No reason.]

As I called to my partner inside my pocket, her voice clearly indicated that she was angry. It's her usual voice but recently it has always been like this for the past few days. She isn't saying it out loud but I guess its probably because I'm using the Mithril sword again.

"Don't sulk like that, c'mon."(renji)

[I am not sulking!]

An instant reply came. Due to her somewhat childish voice, I ended up

smiling instead. I wonder if it was childish of me to think that such an Ermenhilde was really cute?

Done washing my hands, I stood back up. Today's spoils were-5 lizardmen, 20 goblins. It's pretty good but splitting the reward in four, the amount wouldn't be that great though. How many years would it take to repay my debt to Utano-san at such a pace? My earnings for this whole week have been just 4 gold and 10-something copper coins.

It would have been fine if we were just hunting monsters but renting an inn, meals and repair and maintenance of equipment also costs money.

"Miss Francesca, have you calmed down yet?"(renji)

"Ah, yes. Renji-san, are you fine as well?"(fran)

"It's already been a week. I'm perfectly fine. Thanks for worrying about me though."

"No, you don't have to thank....."

"....heavy."(mururu)

Near the embarrassed Miss Francesca's chest, Mururu gave a tired voice. By 'heavy' did she mean Miss Francesca's weight or just her chest. Having changed her equipment at the capital, Miss Francesca did not wear her leather breast plate anymore. Instead she was now dressed more like a magician.

A deep blue coloured robe, and beneath it she wore a blazer of the same colour and a white blouse. At the bottom she wore a long skirt and knee length socks. The attire simply seemed to be made for looking good but contrary to my expectations it actually did have a high magical defence. Well, if it suits her and also provides good defence, nobody can complain I guess.

The only problem, if I were to say, was that now her bountiful chest that had been suppressed by her breastplate before was now fully released. My gaze would automatically end up there at times. Just how incredible are they seriously?

“It’s actually weird how you could recover from those kinds of wounds in just a week, to be honest.”(elf)

“Unlike me, I do know a very skilled Sage after all.”(renji)

After getting the treatment, the only reason I kept on sleeping was due to fatigue. Other than that, I could move around from the very first day.

Gathering the spoils for today, I began to prepare for returning back with Feirona. The sun was still up high but I don’t want to get injured again by pushing myself too much.

“But still, you sure seem more energetic after coming to the capital. Back when we first met, you always seemed to be out of energy.”(elf)

“Things happened. I am, well, in need of some money.”(renji)

To be frank, it’s not just ‘some’ money. Considering 1 copper coin to be hundred yen, I am currently in a debt of around 10,000,000 yen. As you’d expect I haven’t told anyone that I am in such a big debt. After all, it would be so uncool. Even I think that people would look at me weirdly.

10 silver coins. If that debt was made solely to make me work harder, I guess I am dancing right in Utano-san’s palm. Well, I must be overthinking it.

“We’re returning already?”(fran)

“Hm, yeah. Today, Souichi and Yayoi-chan will reach the capital as well after all.”(renji)

“The Brave?”

“Yes, him. Unlike me, he’s an actual hero.”

At least, he’s not the type to go live in debts. I can’t even imagine him living a life like me. Yayoi-chan will probably stop him before he fell into a debt after all. It seemed, Mururu had no interest in it as she simply played around throwing stones in the stream. At least help us with packing back up.

“Today’s lunch..”

Maybe because she realized my gaze, she spoke up. Unable to understand what she meant, I followed her gaze towards the stream only to see that she was taking out fishes with stones. Just how good is her dynamic vision, this wolf!?

Since it'd be a pity to let the fishes she killed flow away with the stream, I took off my boots and folded up my trousers.

"what happened?"(fran)

"Well, I wouldn't want Mururu to go into the water in such a cold weather."(renji)

Saying that, I entered the river. Due to intense cold of the water, my legs stopped moving the moment I entered the stream.

"Are, are you okay?"(fran)

"Co-o.....It's cold!!"(renji)

"Obviously. It's the [ninth month] already.....after getting injured, do you plan on catching a cold this time?"(elf)

[Seriously.]

While listening to Feirona and Ermenhilde's fed up voices, I quickly gathered the fishes floating on the river. Only Miss Francesca was worried for me. In the meantime, Mururu took down more fishes and she didn't even seem to care about me.

Even though the fishes should have been scurrying arround due to me entering the stream, she was still taking them down effortlessly with those dazed eyes of hers. By the time I finished gathering the rest of the fishes, Miss Francesca and Feirona completed packing up.

"Share some with me as well."(renji)

"Okay."(mururu)

[.....haah.]

"I'll start a fire so hurry up and warm yourself up."(feirona)

Coming out of the stream, as I tried to wash away the smell of fishes

from my hands, Feirona said that to me. It was inevitable. My whole body felt completely cold.

“How caring of you. Comrades I can trust are really the greatest thing one can have.”(renji)

“Don’t say things you don’t mean.”(elf)

“No, I’m actually serious you know.”

Feirona gathered the branches and Miss Francesca lit the fire with her magic. As wiped my legs and turned them and my hands towards the fire, that alone seemed to have warmed me up.

“fuu...”

“The fishes, will you cook?”(mururu)

With a plop, Mururu sat beside me. Soon after, Miss Francesca and Feirona also sat around the fire.

“It’s a bit late but let’s have our lunch, shall we?”(renji)

“Yes!”

Miss Francesca gave a somewhat happy reply. She really likes outdoor things like these. Sleeping in tents, preparing a campfire, cooking and eating animals and fishes caught fresh from the wild etc. Unlike what her appearance would suggest, she’s pretty bold.

Giving a small smile seeing her reaction, Feirona began to prepare to cook the fishes. Peeling off the scales, removing the innards, he skewered the fishes on an impromptu stick. While admiring his skill, I also helped in the preparations. That said, I was only copying what he was doing. The first job of my newly bought iron knife was to cut open a fish.

Having completed the preparations, as the fishes roasted over the flames, I washed my hands in the stream. Just then, I felt a strange gaze on me.

[What happened?]

“No, well.....”

I looked towards the place I felt the gaze coming from but there was noone there. Since we have been hunting in this place for a while now, I know there is nothing in that direction.

Was it a monster?

It's normal to think like that. Since we're 4, it probably ran away maybe. Without thinking too deeply, I returned back towards the bonfire.

"Did anyone sense something just now?"(renji)

"Something?....."(fran)

"Yeah. I think I felt a strange gaze at me but...."

Saying that, I looked towards Feirona and Mururu. These two are far more sensitive than me in these areas but they shook their heads.

"Must be my imagination then."(renji)

Ermenhilde didn't sense anything either so that really must be the case.

Deciding to forget about it, I decided to simply stare at the roasting fishes. For some reason, I always feel like I stare at fishes at times like this. It seems it was the same for Miss Francesca and Mururu as well, so there was total silence among the 4 of us. I felt like both Feirona and Ermenhilde gave a sigh but I didn't care about it.

After some time finally, the fishes had been roasted well. There were 6 fishes. Ms Francesca and Feirona took 1 each and me and Mururu took 2 each. Feirona, though his body is of the same size as me, was actually a light eater. It's amazing, to be honest, how he manages that. I feel like I could eat even three of them. Though I probably won't in the end. After all, it's always better to not overeat. As I bit into the fish, since the it came from a clear water stream, there was no taste or smell of mud in it. Since we just caught it, it felt really fresh as well. I ate up my first one very fast.

"Hm?"

[Just now, did you sense magical energy as well?]

When I turned back sensing the gaze once again, Ermenhilde seemed to

have sensed magical energy as well.

"What happened?"

"I felt that gaze again."(renji)

I stood up. It would have been fine if it was just a gaze but since Ermenhilde sensed magical energy as well, I need to be cautious. Confirming the Mithril sword hanging on my waist, I closed in towards the river.

The others as well, though they didn't sense anything, seemed to have become on guard. But even after waiting for a while, nothing happened. Was some other magician fighting somewhere a bit far from here? Seems unlikely. Ermenhilde only sensed magical energy once and can't sense it any more. What's going on? I scratched my head.

In my view was the same old clear stream, trees and the cold wind. There was no change. In fact I felt like the strange one.

"Well, I guess it can't be helped."

I'll just have to deal with it when something happens. Thinking that, I returned near the fire. When I did, Feirona and the others also dropped their guards and went back top focusing on their meal.

"……Oi, one of my fish is gone."(renji)

"ngu, mugugu."

On turning my gaze, the chibi sitting beside me began to chew the fish in her mouth at a vigorous speed. It's bad manners, but that isn't the point. There were three sticks lying in front of her. I called her but she panicked and turned her gaze away.

"Oi Mururu, I won't get angry so look towards me."(renji)

"nn…..you won't get angry?"(mururu)

"Probably."

When I said that, she averted her face again. This brat.

Miss Francesca and Feirona kept on eating their fish with a wry smile.

Well, I did eat one so I guess that's fine. Suddenly I felt the gaze again. I turned again.

[Again?]

"Now this is really getting weird."

Feirona stood up and began checking his equipment. Miss Francesca quickly finished her meal and took similar actions. Only Mururu, whose weapon was her body itself, remained the same. She's still enjoying the taste of the fishes. During the dinner, I am definitely stealing a part from her food. I thought of such childish things. But still, why do Feirona or Mururu still not sense that. That's what worrying me more.

"I guess there's no choice. Let's cross the river."

It's so damn cold though. Well, at least the stream isn't deep.

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Walking for sometime after crossing the stream, there was a tall cliff there. Probably 30m high. And above it was nothing, just a vast plain. No flowers or trees, just plain land. After getting summoned to this world, it was there where we first defeated a Demon God's descendant. Maybe due to its effect, that place has become a dead area. And if you were to walk through that land for almost a week, you'd reach the Tactics City.

Well, leaving that aside, there was something I had not seen on this cliff. Even though we had come here a few times before. It was a cave. It's size was approx, enough to let an ogre get in.....a 5m tall cave. I ended up tilting my head in confusion while looking at the entrance.

"Was that here before?"(renji)

"No, it wasn't, it seems."(fran)

While looking at the map in her hands, Ms Francesca told me that. It's just a simple map but if a cave was this near the capital, it would have been mentioned in the map. That means it's a newly made cave but we had come here only a few days ago as well. Are caves really that easy to

make?

Or maybe––

[I can sense magical energy. It's the same as the one before.]

"So this is it. Ermenhilde, can you tell what it is?"

[I can't. It's too weak……very low level, most probably.]

I lightly tapped Ermenhilde inside my pocket.

[It could be a trap as well. You'll still go?]

"We will?"(mururu)

Hearing Ermenhilde's voice, the other 3 looked straight at me. I am not hiding Ermenhilde's voice from them any longer. It's something like a proof of my trust. Each and everyone of their reactions were fun to see. Right now, since she's sulking, Ermenhilde isn't talking much though. Just how much do you hate seeing me use other swords?

But, right now as expected of the situation, she's not objecting anymore. Hearing Ermenhilde's voice, Mururu asked for my confirmation as well.

"It's majority rule in such cases right?"(renji)

"You're the leader though, Renji."(elf)

"I said this before as well but when the hell was that decided!?"(renji)

While talking like that, I took out a torch from my bag, wet it with oil and asked Ms Francesca to light it up. It will be dangerous but my curiosity won. I was curious of this gaze only I could sense. And for some reason, even now, I don't feel a sense of danger. If we were to rely on my intuition, we should be fine. I thought that without any meaning.

"Hmm then, let's go, shall we?"(renji)

"Yes."

When I said that lightly, Ms Francesca gave her agreement as well. We walked in a line with me at front, then Mururu, Francesca and Feirona at the end. I held the torch and Ms Francesca was using her magic to light the place up as well.

The inside of the cave did not feel uncomfortable and air seemed to pass through well. It might be connected somewhere on the other side. The cave seemed to have been dug very uniformly in the same shape. Normally, a cave is more uneven and rough. Such a well made hole is not something that occurs naturally. It must be dug out through magic.

As I walked on while making theories, Ms Francesca raised a small scream from behind. At the same time, Mururu made a very unwomanly gueeh sound. Both their voices resounded in the cave.

“What happened?”(renji)

“It’s a bug. I’ve killed it though.”

“I see.”

If there’s some trap ahead of us, our voices must have given us away by now. I put my hand on the handle of the Mithril sword. It seems Feirona thought the same as I could sense him becoming a bit more tensed.

We stayed there unmoving for a while but there seemed to be no change. Relaxing a bit again, I removed my hand from the sword.

“Is there nothing here?”

“There are bugs though…….”(fran)

“That’s irrelevant.”(mururu)

Mururu’s voice felt a bit sullen. Most probably, getting surprised by the bug Ms Francesca must have hugged her neck way too tightly from behind. Her voice felt as if her throat was being tightened.

We continued walking deeper inside. It had been 10 mins already I think when I finally saw a bluish light in front of us.

“Could it be the exit?”(fran)

“Seems to dark for that.”9renji)

[…….There’s something there.]

Hearing Ermenhilde’s voice, everyone drew their weapons. Mururu turned her hands into claws.

[Be careful.]

“I’ll go first. Feirona, I’ll leave you to cover me.”(renji)

“It might be difficult though.”(elf)

“Mururu, follow me with some distance between us.”

“Got it.”

Due to the lack of light, it must be difficult for Feirona to shoot arrows. Then, I’ll take Mururu, who possesses extreme physical abilities with me towards the bluish light.

If this really is a trap, I should be the perfect target since I am also holing the torch. I said that but I couldn’t feel any presence other than me. The cave seemed uninhabited. I was sure of it.

But Ermenhilde said that something was there, then there must be. While being cautious I continued walking when the cave opened up.

“____”

I lost my breath.

In front of me was a crystal giving off blue light. It was around 5m big. A really big gem-like crystal was, floating in the air. But even that wasn’t the problem. Floating crystals were definitely rare, after all this a world of swords and magic. I have seen them a few times before as well but,——

“Someone’s sleeping inside?”

Seeing a human sleeping inside a crystal; that was a first even for me. While being cautious of my surroundings I went closer to it. Just as Mururu said, her eyes were closed as if sleeping.

Inside the blue light, a girl, completely naked, was sleeping while hugging her legs. That was the first impression. Since I could feel her life force, I know she isn’t dead.

“It’s fine, you guys can come as well!”(renji)

As I shouted towards Feirona, I handed the torch over to Mururu.

“Can you tell what she is?”(renji)

[.....]

I asked but got no answer from Ermenhilde.

While feeling mystified, I slowly, timidly put my hand on the crystal. It was warm. It didn't have the coldness of a rock, of an inorganic substance. It felt warm, like the skin of a person. And––

"———!?!"

My eyes suddenly met with the girl inside the crystal.

Chapter 39: Gathering (1)

With a heavy sound, I lay down the bag filled with today's earnings on top of the table. 5 lizardmen and 24 goblins. Since we sold their equipments as well, our total earnings was 11 gold and 40 copper coins. Dividing this among the 4 of us, my total earnings for today was 2 gold and 85 copper coins. For something we earned in just half a day, it was pretty great.

Normally I'd be super happy at that and in happiness I'd have spent that money to eat a feast.

But right now, I could only breath out a heavy sigh. The problem was the woman in front of me.

The Imnesia continent has a lot of adventurer guilds but we go to the biggest of them all. The reason was simple, the more people that gather, the more information and request can be found. Accordingly, requests were given out on a first come, first served basis and without a certain level of ability, you'd be unable to make any money.

Inside such an adventurer guild, we––or rather, the girl in front of me stood out like a sore thumb. Black hair that were uncommon in this world and ruby red eyes as if they were made of blood. An almost abnormally white skin and an expression devoid of emotions. It's the woman we found sleeping inside that crystal in that cave.

"Oi, you awake?"(renji)

"Yes."(woman)

She does reply whenever I ask something but I couldn't sense any life in her eyes. She simply looked at me blankly solely because I called out to her. Whether it be her condition right now or the fact that she was inside a crystal, it simply felt too suspicious.

Right now she was wearing ms Francesca's spare clothes along with my old mantle on top. They were thick, dull looking clothes and trousers along with my worn out mantle. Yet somehow, it didn't seem to reduce

her beauty in any way. The gazes of the men in guild was a proof to that. Everytime a guy passed by, they'd definitely give her a side glance. Why are they even trying to hide their gazes when it's a s clear as day though? Well, this woman didn't seem to care about it at all anyway.

It was really a pain to get from that cave back to the capital. After all, she was totally naked inside the crystal. Even we didn't carry any stuff not necessary for monster hunting. Basically, we didn't have anything to let her wear. But we couldn't let her walk naked either so I lent my mantle and to hunt goblins just for some boots for her to wear. I had Ms Francesca go back to the capital first and prepare some clothes for her. It was really mentally tiring till then.

If someone saw me walking around with a nude woman, even if this world's laws were laxer than Japan, my own comrades would never forgive me. Worst case, I wouldn't get to see the sun rise another day.

[It's as if she's dead.....I can't sense any life from her.]

Seriously. Agreeing with Ermenhilde inside my head, I sat down. Ms Francesca and Feirona's gazes turned towards me but I could only sense fatigue from it. It seems they weren't able to get any info out of this woman. Like Ermenhilde said, her dead-like ruby eyes turned towards me. But I couldn't sense any kind of clear will from her eyes. But as she looked at me straight without averting her gaze at all.....it felt as if she was looking directly inside the deepest portions of my heart.

"For the time being, can you at least tell us your name?"(Renji)

".....name?"(woman)

"Yes, your name."

Going by her appearance, she looks about 20 years old. Well, there are beings like elves and vampires as well so appearances can't really be relied on. She was pretty tall, almost the same as Ms Francesca. Even her figure was better than the average woman. She might be losing a bit in chest area but her curves were definitely visible. I can't help it, she was completely nude back in the cave after all. I couldn't not see her even if I wanted to. It's pretty normal as a man to be honest.

“Solnea..”

“Hm?”

Her blank gaze slowly turned away. I followed her gaze but it wasn’t focused at anything particular. She was simply looking outside the window into the bust city streets filled with people. There was nothing else.

“I think I was referred to as Solnea.”

“”You think?””

Both Feirona and Ms Francesca’s voices overlapped. And, I as well, shook my head at her way of speaking. It’s so weird, as if she’s talking about something unrelated to her. Maybe due to the atmosphere she gave off, it felt like, rather than a woman, she was simply an empty vessel shaped in the figure of a woman. I don’t think she’s hiding anything from us either. It didn’t feel like that. She just spoke in such an indifferent manner that it gave off such an impression to me. It felt like seeing a robot that appears in a low budget B-grade movie. I think Ermenhilde is correct in saying that you couldn’t sense any life from her.

In the first place, the question arises how did she survive inside that crystal. A woman living inside a crystal that was in a cave that appeared out of nowhere. I took out a crystal fragment from my pocket. The moment she woke up, that crystal shattered into pieces. Into many small pieces, like the one currently in my hand. I couldn’t sense any magical energy from it wither. It was simply a pretty looking crystal. According to Ermenhilde, there was very slight magical energy inside it when the woman was still inside the crystal though.

I brought back one of the fragments but I doubt it’d be of any use. And with its small size, it probably wouldn’t sell well either.

“Um,mmm, Solnea-san?”(fran)

“What is it, Francesca?”(sol) (T/N: I’m gonna shorten Solnea to ‘sol’ while tagging the dialogues.)

“.....Eh?”(fran)

“Francesca.”(sol)

Saying it again, Solnea pointed towards Ms Francesca. After that came Feirona and Mururu. At the end, she pointed towards me and spoke my name as well.

“Was I wrong?”(sol)

“No, you weren’t but..”

“Somehow, it’s putting me off.”(mururu)

“Seriously.”(renji)

On hearing Mururu’s words, while knowing that was rude, I ended up agreeing with her anyway. She must have learnt our name while listening to our conversations but what was important was the fact that it made me feel wary of her. She named herself and spoke ours as well. To make us feel wary of her from just that must be thanks to the fact that there was still no change in her expression or atmosphere when she said that.

It made me feel like I was looking at a lull sea. No change at all. No matter how far you look, there was only calm, unmoving seawater. There were no waves known as emotions. I wonder if the depths of the oceans were also as weird as this woman.

“Renji.”(sol)

“___”

[.....Muu.]

Speaking that, her pale white beautiful finger slowly moved to point towards my pocket under the table. Where Ermenhilde was.

“Something wrong?”

“.....Can you hear it?”(renji)

“No.”

And as expected, she again answered indifferently as usual. I purposefully showed on my face that I seemed to be wary of her but still, there was no wave in her sea of emotions. She simply, silently, kept on

looking at me, as if her ruby red eyes were looking at something deep inside me. It was me who averted his gaze first. Somehow, I am really bad with these type of people. Like, I can't converse with them properly, and it felt, like only they knew everything about me.

".....What exactly, are you?"(renji)

"I do not know."(sol)

"That again, eh."

She's been like this from the time she woke up in that cave. Why was she in that cave? Why was she sleeping inside a crystal? What even was she? On asking any of these, I would only get the answer that she didn't know.

Feirona gave tired sigh.

"What am I? who am I? Why did I wake up?....."

Her ruby red eyes looked downwards. There, I felt a slight change in her emotions. Was it anxiety? Or fear?

"I do not know."

She telling the truth. Somehow I felt that.

"Rather than not knowing, maybe you just don't remember it?"(renji)

"I wonder."(sol)

She replied in very soft voice. When she finally looked back up again, she looked at me with her usual cold eyes again.

"I do not know that either."(sol)

".....You don't know if you have just forgotten it all or not?"(fran)

Miss Francesca questioned her. When I looked at Feirona, he was frowning. On realizing that I was looking, he looked at me back with sharp eyes. Implying that he left it to me to decided what we were going to do about this woman. This is why I hate being the party leader. After hearing everyone's opinions, the final decision would, in the end, come to me.

I doubt Feirona wants to get more into this trouble. It was already enough that we helped bring her back from the cave to the capital. That counts as helping her, right? My intuition told me that I shouldn't stick my head deeper into this.

"Do you have no memories at all?"(renji)

"Memories...."(sol)

She reacted a bit on my question. As if thinking of something, she looked away again.

Just then, the guild became a bit more noisy suddenly. Getting curious, when I looked towards the swinging doors.....there was woman standing there who looked familiar.

Light brown, ruffled hair and blue eyes that seemed to lack any kind of motivation. Though shorter than Ms Francesca or Solnea, she was still slightly taller than average. Her body dressed in a black one-piece dress was on the slender side but it didn't mean that she was lacking in womanly features. A white apron was wrapped around her thin waist and she gave off a scary level of charm that could pull any man's eye. She also wore high laced boots as well. Her longish skirt fluttered a bit gived a slight peek at her beautiful legs underneath.

If I recall, she turned 22 or 23 this year.

She seemed to be looking for someone as her frilly hair band swayed around. If she would do her hair properly and have a bit more energetic looking eyes, it would be absolutely perfect.

Making you feel like that, this maid, that seemed to be lacking something, stood there.

Yes. It was a maid. A maid that totally didn't belong in such a guild.....a maid that seemed to be lacking motivation. My eyes met with this maid, making me panic as I quickly averted my gaze. Only to meet eyes Mururu with equally blank eyes, though not as blank as Solnea.

"An acquaintence?"(mururu)

“Nope.”

Saying that, I lowered my waist in my chair trying to run away. But faster than that, the aforementioned maid was standing right beside our table. I could only sigh seeing my comrades incredible cheats yet again. Even this girl, who wasn’t even a combat type, possessed more physical ability than me. I just can’t help but sigh at that, can i?

Unable to even react to her movements, both Feirona and Mururu could only look at the maid blankly. Ms Francesca was surprised and Solnea, as expected, remained emotionless and just looked at her.

But the maid, without paying their gazes any mind, looked down at me with a somewhat coldness in her eyes. If it was a guy with a certain specific sexual disposition, he’d be thanking her just for that gaze.

Unfortunately, I did not have such fetishes.

“You’re so heartless. Did you forget about me?”(maid)

“Before that, why are you in maid clothes?”(renji)

This maid woman. Her name was Kudou Rin. Just like me, she was summoned from our world. One of the 13 Heroes, why the hell was she wearing a maid uniform?.....I can’t understand at all. There was the sudden reunion as well; my head was in total confusion.

Realizing my gaze, she gave a slight bow while holding the edges of her skirt. If she had smiled right there, it would have been completely perfect but her expression was as usual unenergetic. The gap was simply too big. Apologise to all the real maids in the world!

“Does it suit me?”(rin)

[fumu, those clothes are cute.]

“Yes, the clothes are cute indeed.”

“.....”

Maybe she herself knew that it didn’t really suit her since she didn’t say anything more. But it did seem like her mood went a bit down though. But the clothes really are nice you know? If she’d put some effort into herself

as well, the clothes would suit her more.

While thinking that, I looked around. A maid that came to the guild out of nowhere and bowed to an adventurer.....We're standing out in all the bad ways. But this girl doesn't care about any of that. Saying that she simply does things 'at her own pace' may sound better but in truth, she simply can't read the mood. She doesn't even care about others. Herself, and her comrades. Only they were her priority. Everything else came afterwards. It's pretty easy to understand personality but I feel that it's pretty extreme. Even right now, only I am visible in her eyes. She isn't even looking at Ms Francesca and the others sitting on the same table. Neither is she aware of the curious gaze from everyone else in the guild right now. In her world, there were only me, her and Ermenhilde right now.

"For the time being, at least take a seat. I'll introduce you to my comrades."(renji)

"Comrades?"(rin)

Let's start from there. If I didn't introduce Ms Francesca and others myself, she wouldn't even notice them till the very end.

Saying that, I looked towards the others sitting with me at the table at which Kudou also looked at them. Her reaction was basically- 'Oh, someone was here?' Like that.

While looking at them and being urged by me, she sat down on a chair. Seeing such a reaction from her while dressed in maid clothing is just weird. As expected this girl has something missing in her head. And, Ms Francesca and Feirona were too stunned from the impact. Even Mururu seemed to be troubled while deciding how to react. Only Solnea remained the same, emotionless as usual.

"The Elf is Feirona, the beastwoman is Mururu, the magician Ms Francesca. And this is Solnea, who we met just a while ago."(renji)

"Oh yeah, I heard about them from Yuuko-chan. Yamada-kun's current party."(rin)

“And this is Kudou Rin.”

“Nice to meet you Elf-san, Beastwoman-chan, Magician-chan, and black haired girl.”

[You haven’t changed, have you Rin?]

“Humans don’t change that easily you know? I am me. Others are others.”

What kind of naming sense is that. I shook my head. She’s rude as usual. Maybe surprised from Kudou’s reaction, Ms Francesca looked towards me.

“Rin Kudou-sama……..is it?”(fran)

“Don’t know who you’re referring to but yes I’m Kudou Rin, magician-chan.”(rin)

“Uh, eh?!”

With a speed that couldn’t be foreseen going by the lax expression on Kudou’s face, she grabbed Ms Francesca’s hand over the table. Just as Ms francesca raised a voice confused from what’s happening, I stepped on Kudou’s foot beneath the table almost at the same time. SInce she’s wearing boots it probably didn’t hurt her much but she let go of Ms Francesca’s hand.

“As usual, you have cute women around you.”(rin)

“I’m not going to ask what you mean by ‘as usual’ but as usual, you’re fast to move as well eh?”(renji)

“But she’s a cute girl. I can’t help but make a move on her can I?”

“……..don’t say that right in front of the person in question.”

“Eh?”

In that momentary gap, this time Kudou tried to grab Mururu’s hand who was sitting opposite of her. But as expected of Mururu, she quickly withdrew her hand and beneath the table before Kudou could grab it.

Instead of being surprised, Kudou made a happy expression seeing

Mururu's reaction. She's a really bad mannered maid. She should get scolded by her master. But, oh well, she's her own master here after all. That's the kind of personality she has.

"So, what's going on? You didn't come to the guild for no reason have you?"(renji)

"I came to get you, Yamada-kun. Yuuko-chan is calling."

"Aah, I see."

Right, Souichi has already reached the castle it seems. Due to Solnea's appearance, I completely forgot about him. I guess they need to talk about the demon we captured back at Magic city.

There's Solnea's case as well, as well as this demon. My head hurts. All this difficult thinking is making me depressed. I'm pretty sure none of this is going to lead to something fun. If I were to use a term used in our original world, this was clearly a 'flag' for me.

"How did you know I was here, at the guild, by the way?"(renji)

"Ara, there's no way I'll mistake where Yamada-kun is ever, will I?"(rin)

[Muu.]

Saying that, slowly, casually came near me and leaned her body over me. Raising a small voice, Ms Francesca's cheeks turned red. Finding her expression interesting, Kudou began to come even closer only to quickly dodge away as I raised my fist to hit her in the head. As usual, her reaction speed is incredible. Damnit.

"Don't play around. You probably used Ermenhilde's magical energy as a guide, didn't you?"(renji)

"You're no fun....."(rin)

Kudou was extremely sensitive to the flow of magical energy. Especially if it was our, the summoned ones' magical energy, she could sense us even while being far away.

In my case, since I have no magical energy, I have Ermenhilde. She must have used that to get here.

Holding carious titles like [Metalsmith] [Item Creator], Kudou forges iron, while sensing its magical energy, and turns them into items. According to her, by doing that, she's able to create items of far better quality than those made by anyone else.

I have not much knowledge about item or weapon creation but going by what an acquaintance of mine, who is a craftsman, said, her methods are the same as what dwarves or elves use. That is, the forging techniques of dwarves along with the magic bestowal techniques of Elves. Combined with the creativity of a human from another world. That's what Kudou is. During our journey, I remember her making all sorts of dangerous things like bombs, poison etc etc.

"Then, let's part ways for today, shall we?"(renji)

"Yeah, sure."(elf)

Feirona agreed to my proposal. If Utano-san is calling me, I can't not go. She rarely calls me for personal reasons after all.

While wishing that this isn't another sort of trouble, I sighed. At the same time, I also want to talk about Solnea as well. The girl who knows nothing except her name and awoke from inside a crystal. No matter how I look at it, it's way too suspicious.

"What is it?"(sol)

"....."

The moment I looked away for a bit, Kudou's gaze turned towards Solnea but Solnea's reaction was as usual. An emotionless voice. Unreflecting red ruby eyes. I wonder what she thought about her as JKudou quickly lost interest in her.

"I'll go back first."

Saying just that, she left the guild. I could only feel sympathy for all the men eyeing Kudou from behind as she left. That girl prefers women over men. And the hurdle to become Kudou's ideal partner was too high. For someone who seems to be lacking energy all the time, that girl expects her partner to have way too many qualities. That's the kind of woman she

is. She'll have an irritating personality even if one was to date her I think. And if someone still wanted to date her after knowing all that, he/she is either an angel or has a very weird fetish.

But still, that was strange. I looked at Solnea. Even with her expression less face and emotionless eyes, she's still definitely a beauty, anyone would agree. I was confused why Kudou didn't make a move on her. No, that was good in its own way I guess, especially for Solnea.

"Sorry about that. It seems I have stuff to attend to so I'll be leaving first."(renji)

"No, no need to worry about us."(fran)

"The reward."(mururu)

"yeah, let's split it up quickly."

Saying that, I split our reward in 4 parts. And I picked one gold coin from my portion and handed it to Solnea.

"Go buy some clothes with that. I'll come to take back my mantle later."(renji)

"....."

[Oi, but your debt.....]

"Don't worry too much, we can earn as much money as we want later."

[.....I'm sacred for what's gonna happen.]

Solnea closely inspected the gold coin's both sides blankly.

"That's a gold coin. You can buy things with that."(renji)

"Is that so?"(sol)

[So she doesn't even know that much.....]

I could only shake my head. Mururu was the same but, do I have to teach another one how money is used? When my gaze turned towards Ms Francesca, she gave a troubled nod.

"Sorry, but if you have time, please look after her."(renji)

“Yes.”(fran)

Finally, I glanced at Feirona asking him to keep Solnea under surveillance. I don’t really like this, but I can’t just leave her alone like this either can I? Not to mention, this Solnea has way too many mysteries around her.

Giving a wry smile, Feirona gave a nod. To understand my thoughts without even saying anything, he’s a really reliable comrade.

“Also, if you’re going to rent a room in an inn, tell me where. I’ll be worried if you suddenly dissapeared.”

“I understand.”

Finally, I stood up. Though I pretty much have asked Ms Francesca and others to keep her under constant surveillance.

Feirona who understood that, gave a shrug with a troubled expression. Well, it’d be okay if this was just me being over conscious of her.

Putting today’s reward inside my purse, I left the guild.

As expected, I could feel envious gazes from all the men inside. Even though I don’t have a relation of that kind with any of them. In the first place, isn’t Feirona a man as well? Why am I the only one getting all the hate?

While thinking of such things, I finally was outside and at the entrance, Kudou was waiting for me. Was she being flirted with, she was surrounded by many men.

“.....”

“.....”

Giving a sidelong glance at her, I ignored her and began to walk away. At the same time, Kudou slipped through the encirclement of men instantly. What incredible agility. The men were feeling surprised seeing the maid in front of them suddenly disappearing. What a wasteful sue of the cheat-like physical abilities she has.

“How troublesome, you should’ve helped me, Hero.”(rin)

“That would be even more troublesome. Also, who the hell’s a Hero? I am not going to do anything as embarrassing as that.”

“Even though you used to, back then.”

“Back then, not anymore.”

That was one of my mistakes of my youth. Definitely.

[.....You guys resemble each other a lot, at times.]

While hearing Ermenhilde’s sigh mixed words, I thought about it. Even I am not as unmotivated as Kudou is, I think.

I sighed seeing Kudou return to her usual way of talking as compared to her talkativeness while in front of Ms Francesca. What a façade she has. She gets down just by not having beautiful women beside her. While in front of Utano-san or Aya, she’d tease me and at other times, she’d make moves on other women. And when no one’s around, she’d laze around at her own pace. What a troublesome personality she has. That hasn’t changed at all from back then. Well, certainly, a person’s personality doesn’t change in just 1 year.

“That aside..”

That Kudou, with her usual unenergetic voice spoke up. I’m still feeling uncomfortable due to the surrounding gazes you know? A maid and an adventurer. We really stand out too much.

“Who was that black haired girl?”(rin)

“Don’t know. I met her today. Her name’s Solnea it seems.”(renji)

Or rather, I definitely introduced her as well, didn’t I? Did she not even hear me properly?

“fuuun.”

[Did you sense something?]

“Who knows.”

Even though she was the one who asked, she answered with lack of interest. I have a lot to say about her attitude but I know she’s just that

kind of person. I'll only get tired if I didn't get used to it.

"Leaving that aside, why the hell are you in a maid uniform?"(renji)

"It's easy to move in and it's no problem even if it gets dirty. Also, even if I sleep with it on, the wrinkles on the dress don't stand out."(rin)

What a dreamless, hopeless answer. Seriously, apologise to all the maids in the world.

Chapter 40: Gathering (2)

As I entered the castle, I felt a cold breeze caress my cheeks. The stone-made castle was extremely chilly, especially during winters. I wonder how cold do these iron armour clad knights are feeling standing as guard like that for so long.

While thinking of that, I walked beside Kudou through the corridor. Were they used to seeing Kudou's weird maid getup, as the passing by guards and nobles didn't seem to pay any attention towards her. It could be that they are mistaking her for my maid.....actually, it's very likely that that's the case. Even though I have no intention of ever hiring such a dangerous, unmotivated maid, ever. In the first place, I don't even have the option to do so.

"By the way, where is Utano-san right now?"(renji)

I came back to the castle since I was called but I realized that I hadn't asked where exactly she was in here. For now I was normally walking towards Utano-san's room but it'd be a pain if she wasn't actually there so I asked Kudou just in case. But the person herself seemed to maintain her usual tired-looking expression.

"Probably in her room?"(rin)

[You didn't even ask her?]

"She just asked me to bring you back after all."

Saying that, she stopped walking. I did the same. Since, coincidentally, we were no standing right at the crossroads of the corridors, all the guards' attention focused towards us making me feel a bit uncomfortable.

I looked at her asking 'what happened?' but she simply looked at me. It's difficult to even converse with her. She must have stopped on a whim, I'm sure.

"I actually have to go to the training grounds."(rin)

"You?"(renji)

[Now that's rare.]

"Well, rather than Yuuko-chan, that place seems to become more interesting after all."(rin)

Just then, a slight sense of emotion appeared on her face. It felt a bit devilish, like she was about to pull a prank——She's definitely going there just to tease someone.

At times like these, someone will definitely end up as a victim. The ones I could think of were me, Utano-san and Aya. Were children outside her aim or maybe she actually had some shred of conscience left in her yet, she didn't seem to tease Yui-chan ever. In a way, she plays the role of a helpful elder sister to her. That may be her true feelings as well though.

That aside, with this timing, is the victim going to be Aya?

"It's not Aya-chan."(rin)

Did my thoughts appear on my face? She answered me before I even spoke.

But then, who else is left? I began thinking, but I soon realized that we were still standing in the middle of the corridor, that too, at the centre of a crossroad. Feeling the gazes of the nobles and knights passing through, I cleared my throat.

"Then, I'll head towards Utano-san's room."(renji)

"Sure. You can see the grounds from her room as well, right?"(rin)

"Hm? Yeah.."

"When you get to her room, be sure to look from the window."

Saying that, with light footsteps as if she was skipping, Kudou walked away. I could only tilt my head in confusion alone.

[What was that?]

"Who knows."

I can't really tell how her mind works anyways. That fact has never changed. It seemed to be the same for Ermenhilde as well thus the

question. I didn't have an answer and neither did Ermenhilde ask anything further.

Well, I'll understand when I get to Utano-san's room. I also began to walk. The training ground, training ground. Did something happen there? I was busy with my adventurer jobs so I haven't had the chance to go to the barracks and talk to others making me feel a bit regretful.

As I kept on walking, I suddenly recalled that Souichi and the others should have reached here by now. I forgot due to the incident with Solnea but if I recall correctly, he was supposed to get here by noon.

"Is it Souichi?"

[Hm?]

"Kudou's prey. Souichi is supposed to get here today."

[Oh right.]

Finally recalling that, I felt much more relaxed having figured it out. Though I wonder if there really was a need for me to worry about it that much. It was a small thing, but figuring out something still feels fulfilling. Well, the fact that I raised my voice in excitement a bit too much only to get the guards look at me weirdly was a bit embarrassing though.

Talking with Ermenhilde, I finally reached Utano-san's room. Knocking the door twice, a reply came soon enough. As I opened the door, I felt the warm air that comes from a fireplace burning.

"Hey there, Utano-san."(renji)

"Hello Yamada-kun. Where's Rin-chan?"(yuuko)

"She had something to do at the training grounds apparently."

[You know something Yuuko?]

"Not really. Since it's the training grounds, she probably has some business with Souichi-kun or Yuuta-kun maybe?"

The first thing I noticed after entering her room was the giant spherical

blue crystal on the table. Kept on a gold pedestal with intricate designing, one could tell at a single glance that it was extremely expensive. The first thing that came to my mind was that it resembled the crystal balls used by shady fortune tellers back in our own world. If Utano-san wore black robe and tried to act like one.....it'd actually suit her very well.

But still, that wasn't here till yesterday. And it's almost twice the size of my fist. Realizing my gaze, she stood up from her work desk and moved towards the table. When she pointed her palm towards the crystal, purple lightning flashed inside. Now it looks great and all, but I can't tell anything just from that much you know? Though I can tell that it's some sort of magic item.

"So what is it?"(renji)

"Purple, eh?"

Ignoring my question, she spoke that. By purple, she means the colour of that lightning eh? Looking at her again, I urged her to explain.

"The tournament table. Since it'd be a pain otherwise, I'm deciding it through magical energy colour."(yuuko)

[.....tournament table?]

"For the martial art tournament of course."(yuuko)

I was about to pray for her hearing her tired voice but then suddenly stopped. Wait, wait, wait a second.

"I'm not entering though?"(renji)

"Work for your debt."

So I am not even allowed to have an opinion it seems. Well, it was my fault to fall into the debt. Actually, it was my bad to sell the sword I got from the king himself just cause I was low on money I guess? If it was a game, it'd be one of those items you cannot sell or will be stopped by the merchant himself, or something like that.

While thinking of that, I sat down on the chair near the table. But still, this really is one damn big crystal. I wonder how much you'd get if you

were to sell it. Did I instantly think of that solely because I was currently in debt or simply because I naturally possessed the mind of a guy in poverty?

"Don't make such a face. I'll give you a proper reward for it as well."(yuuko)

"Eh?"

"If you appear, it'll be one silver coin. If you win, the prize is 5 silver coins so it isn't exactly a bad deal for you, you know?"(yuuko)

Fumu, I see. I thought putting my finger to my chin. As she said, there is merit for me as well. Above all, there's one silver coin just for appearing. Though it might vary depending on allotment of groups, but I doubt I can win the whole thing though. After all, I know for sure that Souichi, Aya and Masaki-chan will appear. I really can't win against those 3. Utano-san probably won't take part but maybe even Kuuki might enter it.

I don't what she thought of me as I pondered over such things, Utano-san ringed the bell kept on her desk. In a moment's notice, the door was knocked. A maid appeared from behind the door with, unlike Kudou, a refreshing smile on her face. As you'd expect, this is what a true maid is all about. Yeah.

Ordering some drinks and snacks from her, Utano-san sat down on the chair opposite of me on the other side of the table.

"So Kudou said you had some business with me?"(renji)

"This was it."(yuuko)

[Participating in the tournament, eh?]

"Yes. I'll be counting on you to pull in lots of crowd okay?"(yuuko)

"Even if you tell me that so straight....."

I can't feel happy at all. I am aware how many people are working hard just to enter this tournament but when she says it like that, I understood what she meant by it.

Though the Demon god is dead, it's only been an year after that. Just as there are people with hope, there are also those who are wounded and those who are still in despair. How should I say this, but the people of this world really need something they can completely rely on right now. And that would be the Goddess Astraera and her apostles, the 13 heroes. That is, us. Appearing in the tournament, she is basically asking for us to make a presence and stand out for the people. Seeing the people who saved the world, the masses would also feel more motivated. Or something like that.

I doubt it'd go that easily but it's true, it might have some effect.

"For the time being, if I have to face someone in the first round..."(renji)

"Souichi-kun or Masaki-chan, which one suits you better?"(yuuko)

"Souichi, I guess."

[Are you aiming to win?]

"Don't ask for the impossible."

The problem is me. I don't intend to let my guard down or anything but there's a heavy chance that I really might lose to some random adventurer or a student. Nobody wants to see a hero like that.

That's why when I asked Utano-san to face another one of the heroes in the very first round, she quickly gave approval. It seems she has put some thought about it as well. So I guess it'd be the one silver coin for participating. With this pace, I'll be free of my debt after completing Utano-san's request 10 times eh?.....I doubt it'd be that easy.

Just then, the door was knocked again. The maid from before appeared. I could smell the soft fragrance of sweets. She gently placed the expensive looking teapot and cups on the table and then placed the plate filled with baked sweets. It really looks tasty.

As I gave a small thanks, the maid left the room after giving a bow.

"What is it?"(yuuko)

"Nothing, just, she was really different from Kudou."(renji)

“Rin-chan is well...”

“She suddenly appeared in maid clothes at the guild. It was really embarrassing.”

“Well you have my condolences.”

Saying that in a voice that seemed to be enjoying it, she poured tea in the cups. Smelling the brilliant smell, I was about to pick the pot when Utano-san poured a cup for me as well. As I gave my thanks, she gave a small smile. She seems to be in a good mood. I also feel happy seeing her like this.

“But still, this world is inconvenient yet convenient in weird places. Back in our world, we had to pay just to see a maid.”(renji)

[In your world, was money required just to meet maids?]

“Yeah.”

“.....”

Telephones, cars, internet; we don’t have the convenience that comes from a developed civilisation but instead had magic and maids that appeared from a single ring from a bell. If you were to ask which is more convenient, I can’t really answer.

While I was thinking of it, I suddenly felt a sharp stare coming from Utano-san’s narrowed eyes.

“Have you visited such shops?”(yuuko)

“Shop?”

“You know, those shops where you get to meet maids by paying money, have you gone there before?”

“Oh. Nah, I never had the courage too.”

I didn’t actually had the time to, either. I wasn’t really completely focused on work but if you were to ask if I had a lot of free time, the answer would be ‘No’. Really, what the hell had I been doing with my life? I don’t even think of that nowadays. I’ve already forgotten all about it. I

wonder if that's because I have accepted this world as a place where I can live.

Such gloomy thoughts. Holding the tea in my mouth for a while, I ended up gulping it all together.

"fuun....."

[What happened, Yuuko?]

"Ah, nothing."

Was she in deep thought? While I was distracted, Utano-san seemed to have been thinking about something while supporting her beautiful chin on her fingers. Ermenhilde asked her but her reply seemed to be a bit absent-minded.

While looking at her like that, I took another sip from my tea. And also one of the sweets kept here. It resembled the cookies I knew of. Though a bit smaller. As I ate it, it's faint sweet flavour spread inside my mouth and I ended up eating another one. These are really tasty.

Just then, I suddenly remembered what Kudou had said. I was supposed to look at the training grounds was I?

"Excuse me for a second."(renji)

Saying that, I stood up a headed towards the window and looked through it. Just like my room, the training grounds were fully visible from her window.

It was easy to find Kudou. She's in a maid dress after all. There was only one like that at the grounds. And for some reason, that maid was currently hugging at Souichi's arm right now. Really, what the hell is she doing? Near Souichi were two women. One was Yyayoi-chan, Souichi's younger sister. My enhanced eyesight, due to the cheat, showed me her cramped, or ratehr fake smiling face. How scary. From here, I could only see Souichi and Kudou's back but I'm pretty sure, the elder brother is currently making an extremely pale face right now. I could easily imagine it.

The other one was a woman, slightly older than Souchi and the others, with long black hair tied at the neck area. She was also wearing a blazer similar to Souichi and a skirt that ended just above her knees. Her bare legs were really dazzling to the eye. Where have I seen––I think that uniform is probably from one of the schools at Tactics City. This woman seemed to be laughing. I can't hear her so I'm not sure though. In her hands was a sword in a scarlet scabbard. It was a curved sword, a katana, that shouldn't normally exist in this world.

And the soldiers were looking at these 4 from a distance. Among them, Kuuki and Aya were also present. I feel like they should be stopping this but I guess they won't even if I was directly there. It's just too much fun to watch after all.

"Those guys get along, as usual."

[Really?]

On my words, Ermenhilde answered with a question. Well, I'm pretty sure they do. How long has it been since I've seen this fight over Souichi?

How nostalgic. Well, Kudou's just there to instigate the other 2 though. As I gazed at them through the window, Utano-san came close to my side. It ended up with both of us looking at them through the window.

"Well, since Yuuta's there, it won't end up bad I guess."(yuuko)

"I doubt Kudou would instigate them so much in the first place though."(renji)

She's just having fun teasing Yayoi-chan and Masaki-chan. Was this what she wanted to show me? Just then, Kudou, looked towards us from the grounds. When our gazes met, she gave a wide smile with her usual half-open eyes. Just when I was wondering what was that about, she whispered something in Souichi's ears. Suddenly, with a surprised face, Souichi looked towards us. Kudou, what the hell did she say to him?

"It seems the children are having fun."(yuuko)

[.....Really?]

“They playing around energetically, aren’t they?”

Can you call that playing around? I do think they’re energetic but it’s a bit different isn’t it?

Currently, [Demonic Sword User] Masaki-chan was manifesting a demonic sword in her hand so I doubt we could call it ‘playing around’ anymore. Well, she hasn’t unsheathed it yet so it’s fine right?

Going by the colour of her scabbard, it should be a fire type sword. If she drew that out, a part of the training ground will become charcoal.

“Oh well, whatever.”

I had lots of things to say but I decided to just let it go. I’m sure Souichi will deal with it somehow. Do your best, Brave-sama. It’s the privilege of the Brave hero to have trouble with women.

While thinking of that, I sat back down on my chair. I took a sip from my now cold tea, but it was still pretty tasty. As expected of the royal castle, the tea leaves used are top class.

“Oh right, I needed to discuss something with you as well, utano-san.”(renji)

“What is it?”

“umm, do you have a map?”

“Map? Why?”

“I found a new cave. Probably, it’s a very recent one, that someone made with magic, I think.”

“……What’s this about?”

Saying that she stood up and brought out a map neatly kept in one of the drawers in her desk. Since the crystal was in the way, I picked it up to move it away somewhere else. Looking around, for the time being, I decided to keep it on the bookshelf near the window.

“Ah, be careful with that. It’s very costly okay?”(yuuko)

[Use both of your hands to hold it, fool!]

Yeah yeah. Giving a half-hearted reply, I decided to place it carefully on the work desk in the end. If it's expensive, bookshelves won't do, yeah. If I broke it here, my debt will rise yet again. It's normal that I instantly thought like that.

"So, where did you find this new cave?"(yuuko)

"hm, umm, let's see.."(renji)

I looked over at the full map. It's not very different from what I had seen some time ago. A few new places have been added as well but those are mostly lakes or forests we marked as landmarks while on our journey back then. The map lacks a proper measurement scale though, so it's not that reliable.

Leaving that aside, as expecetd, even on Utano-san's map there was no indication of the cave where we found Solnea sleeping. So it really is a brand new cave. Well, it's not that deep and there isn't anything inside it now either though.

"The cave was somewhere around here, I think."

While standing beside Utano-san, who was sitting on a chair, I pointed towards the location of the cave. East of the capital, near the [plains of death] where we once battled a descendant of the Demon God. 2 yrs ago, we fought the strongest Demon on the Imnesia continent there.

But it seems even Utano-san remembered that there was no cave there before since she looked at me doubtfully.

".....I'll send the soldiers to check it out, just in case."(yuuko)

"Yeah, do that. That cave seemed really suspicious."(renji)

"Suspicious?"

"It seemed to have been made with magic, it wasn't there when I went there 2-3 days ago, and above all there was a person living inside a crystal in the cave."

"A person inside a crystal?"

I only shrugged my shoulders when she asked that back to me. Well it's

only normal I guess. Humans, normally, can't exactly survive inside crystals after all. Then what was she?

Thinking about Solnea, I brought out a fragment of that crystal and placed it on the table.

"This is?"(yuuko)

"It's a fragment of the giant crystal inside which the person was sleeping. It broke when they woke up."

"……..You can't expect me to believe this so suddenly."

Saying that, she picked up the crystal and brought it close to her eye, examining it looking like an expert.

[Can you sense anything? I can't even sense magical energy from it anymore.]

"Anymore? It had magical energy before?"(yuuko)

[Yeah. I definitely felt it. Though the magician in our party didn't feel it.]

"Hmm.."

Softly, her flaxen hair swayed even though there was no wind insdei the room. Magical energy. Most probably, Utano-san must have put in magical energy inside the crystal.

But there was no visible change in the crystal. After some time had passed, Utano-san gave a small sigh and the slightly oppressing feeling of her magical energy disappeared.

"Looks like a normal crystal to me."(yuuko)

"It'd be great if that was true. The person is currently staying with us for now. Above all, according to them, they are also suffering from amnesia."

"……..How troublesome. Amnesia, eh? I want to meet them once."

"That'd be really helpful. Should I come here with them tomorrow?"

"Yes, do that. Let's take care of all such troubles before the tournament

starts.”

Saying that, she put down the crystal fragment back on the table. Solnea —-the woman who was sleeping inside the crystal. That alone was suspicious enough, but she’s also an amnesiac. She gets full points for being suspicious. Suddenly, I felt Utano-san staring at me again.

“Eh, umm, what?”(renji)

“This person, she wouldn’t happen to be a woman would they?”(yuuko)

[How did you know? It’s as you say.]

“……”

What’s up with that heavy sigh!

“Again, eh?”(yuuko)

“Somehow it feels like you’re making this out to be my fault but it’s just my imagination right?”(renji)

“Yes, of course, you did nothing wrong. Nothing at all, okay?”(yuuko)

[What happened? Yuuko?]

“Nothing, I’m just a bit tired.”(yuuko)

No, seriously, I didn’t even see Solnea as a proper woman. Giving a wry smile at Utano-san’s reactions, I drank more tea while hiding my lips with the teacup.

If I told this to Aya, will I get the same reaction as well?

Chapter 41: Gathering (3)

Saying that she had work to do now, Utano-san drove me out of her room. As I left the warm room, the corridor felt colder than normal making me rub my hands together.

I recalled Utano-san's expression while she drove me out of her room. I feel like her gaze was 3 times more colder than usual. Did Solnea's case weigh that much on her mind. There are hardly many things that can make Utano-san worry though.

Sighing, and thinking about some way to lift her mood again, I headed towards the Training grounds. Might as well go and meet Souichi and the others as well. I should show my face to O'brien-san as well. Since he was busy with his Knight duties and I spent more time at the guild, we somehow had yet to meet. If I delayed it any longer I feel like he'll get angry and yell at me.

Even though he's reaching his fifties, he's still active in the field. I can't even tell what would happen when he gets angry.

When I showed up at the grounds, Kuuki came towards me with a surprised face. Aya also came alongside him.

When I saw Aya, I recalled my conversation with Utano-san……about Solnea. For a second, I couldn't think of a way to start a conversation with her. In the meantime, Aya came right in front of me and looked up towards me. Her side ponytail swayed around energetically showing off her girlish charm.

"Did something happen?"(aya)

"Hm?"

"No, you look like you're worrying about something."(aya)

I am. Yes. Wait, can I say that I am actually worried?

I recalled how Utano-san questioned me about various things regarding my relationship with Solnea. Seriously, I met her just today. In fact, I didn't just 'meet' her like normal people do either. It'd be better to say

that I took her under my protection for now.

While thinking of that, I gave a smile towards Aya as thanks for worrying about me. At that, Aya also blushed and gave a shy smile. Really, Aya's pureness heals me.

"So, what happened?"

"Oh yeah, Kuuki, just listen to this.."(renji)

"……uwahh. I don't want to."(kuuki)

While getting healed by Aya, I tried to speak to Kuuki but he just made an unpleasant face openly. Goddamnit, this heartless bastard.

Back then, he used to listen to me with such a happy smile. It must be that. He must have gotten complacent after getting in the relationship with the princess. I guess that's also growth in a way. How envious. Just get married already. Then, I'll give all my blessings (curses) to you.

"I helped someone and ended up worsening Utano-san's mood."(renji)

"Just quietly apologise to her."

"……"

"It must be another woman again, right?"

He didn't even think before speaking as if it actually was all my fault. Oh well, I guess this isn't the first time something like this has happened so I guess they are not to blame.

To save someone, you need power. Whether it be fighting power, monetary, or fame/reputation. It is definitely necessary. Back then, I was lacking in all of them yet wanted to save others so I ended up trying to save them all anyway. As a result I ended up displeasuring Utano-san countless times. And I can't even deny that none of those were women related matters either.

I am a man after all. I can't help but lend a hand to a woman in distress. Makes me motivated as well. All the more so if it is a beauty. No, I did save many men as well, okay? But still, I guess my image inside Utano-san's head is still that of a 'womanizer'. Even though it's mostly

unintentional.

“.....What kind of a person do you take me for?”(renji)

What the hell did he mean by ‘must be another woman’ and ‘again’, huh? It’s like I only try to save women. I actually do try to save people regardless of their gender you know? What a rude guy. While I was talking to Kuuki, my right sleeve was lightly pulled. It was Aya.

But right now, Aya was not showing her smile from before and was looking at me with a somewhat troubled face.

[What is it, Aya?]

“Ah, umm.....”

I’m guessing she must be curious about the person I saved.

She wants to ask but must be feeling embarrassed to do so. Her reaction felt so cute that even I felt that it was bad of me to just keep on looking at her like this and not doing anything.

[Don’t trouble Aya too much, Renji.]

“I don’t intend to. I’ll answer as long as she properly asks.”(renji)

“Uuu.....”

[That’s exactly what’s troubling her you fool, seriously!]

When I gave a laugh seeing Aya at a loss for words after what Ermenhilde said, Ermenhilde sighed at me. Looking at our exchange, Kuuki gave a wry smile as well. Aya finally calmed down as well as her expression became lighter after taking a deep breath. Just then, after a sound of explosion rand followed by the cheering of the soldiers. Judging from the people at the grounds right now and the sound that just came, it must be Masaki-chan’s demonic sword. It must be one her abilities.

I’d be worried if her opponent was someone normal but if its Souichi, he’d be able to parry her properly. The other two with me seemed to be of the same opinion as they didn’t seem to show any signs of panicking. We casually moved to become a part of the encircling crowd of soldiers as well. Surprised from my sudden appearance maybe, the crowd of soldiers

split in two to give me a way through. Feeling all of their gazes accumulate towards me, I scratched my head in displeasure and flinched for a moment. Kuuki and Aya seemed to be used to this as they walked down the path created by the soldiers normally. As I quickly followed those two, I saw Souichi and Masaki-chan exchanging sword blows in the centre. In their hands were a blue Holy sword and a scarlet demonic sword. Well, in this case, it'd be appropriate to call hers a Demonic katana.

Yayoi-chan and Kudou were standing a bit far away while talking with each other. As usual, yayoi-chan's smile seemed to be a bit scary. Well leaving those two aside, I turned towards the two who were slashing at each other at a speed difficult to follow with human eyes.

With a shrill sound, sparks flew over the field and ground was gouged out every time they moved around while kicking the field. Seeing as neither of their swords were enveloped in the usual blue flames and scarlet flames, I could tell that they weren't even serious right now. They are just testing each other. Something like that. But even at that, every slash split the air and blasted the stone ground. The soldiers around had taken measures to not get damaged but it still looked dangerous for them. I don't know what Kudou said to incite them but right now, both of them were only trying to see each other's growth. Looking closely, both of them were actually smiling at each other while using deadly slashes at each other. They are confident that their opponent could dodge attacks of this level.

We were foreigners. Summoned from another world, receiving the divine protection of the goddess, and received powers and abilities alien to the residents of this world. That gift was much lesser inside me but even I would never lose to some random guy. But the remaining twelve were different. Especially these two in front of me, even more so. Even though they are holding back, they were still at a level not a single person here could hope to reach. In close combat, not even Kuuki or Aya can win against those two. They lack people who possess the same level of strength. That's why they enjoy training against each other so much. The

shrill sound of swords clashing and the roaring explosions of flames made my eardrums vibrate. Did they start concentrating more, I am unable to catch even the sound of clashing swords right now. Every move was so fast. While swing their sword at a speed that left after images, they kept on fighting while smiling and truly enjoying it. But even that won't continue forever. Masaki-chan was the first one to realize my presence. Even though they were fighting at unimaginable speeds, I could tell that our eyes met for a split second. And at that split second, her movements dulled. Souichi wasn't naïve enough to let go of that opening. That guy has timid personality but he would never ever let an opening in the enemy's defences go unpunished. He had the strength to fully utilise that opening in his favour. He possessed the sense to know exactly when to go for the finishing blow. And following it, Souichi rushed in towards Masaki-chan. She countered with a super fast thrust aiming for is head.

The finale came in an instant. Slipping through the thrust of the katana, the blue blade was thrust right underneath Masaki-chan's throat. The sound of swords stopped and silence came over the ground.

"I surrender. It's my loss."(masaki)

"Alright!"(souichi)

The silence was broken by Masaki-chan's surrender and Souichi's shout of joy. After all that action, they seem to be only slightly out of breath. Their bodies made them almost unable to feel fatigue. The remaining soldiers simply stared at them in a daze. This was what Hero was like. The Brave who saved the world. The humans who were the hope of the people. In their gazes were feelings of respect and aspiration, and excitement.

After a while, the soldiers returned back to their training while heated up from the battle they saw. The Brave and The Demonic Sword user. The battle between the two Heroes that stood at the front lines swing their swords during the journey to subjugate the Demon God. It's only normal to get motivated seeing such a battle.

"Yo."(renji)

“Mouu, don’t appear so suddenly just when it was getting good, Yamada-san.”(masaki)

“.....was that my fault?”(renji)

“Just when I was getting all excited, I lost all concentration after all.”

[It’s your fault to have lost concentration though, isn’t it?]

“Muuu.”

Cutely puffing her cheeks, she, Hisaki Masaki, quickly returned to showing a sweet energetic smile. The Demonic Sword user who wished the goddess for [A sword that can tear through even fate]. If in recall correctly, her house was a shrine but she herself lacked any such ladylike manners. If I had to say, she was more like the big sister type of girl. Even now, she was simply laughing off her loss to Souichi. Inside, she must be planning to take revenge for the loss later though.

She’s a sore loser but strong willed. I think back then she used to say “I’m a Miko!” a lot. Well with her long black hair, a miko dress would definitely suit her a lot. But her personality is another case altogether. She’s the type of woman who’s idea of fun is to fight Souichi with swords. And she’s easy to read. To speak specifically, she’s the type to quickly take action and jump directly at a horde of monster and start swinging around her sword. She’s actually more manly than even me, in a sense.

“Huh, Renji-niichan. When did you come here?”(souichi)

And Souichi was surprised, finally realizing I was here. Just how concentrated to the fight were you? Well, that’s a part of his strength though. But still, seeing him stand beside Masaki-chan, did this guy really not grow much in terms of height in the past one year? He’s actually a bit shorter than her. Not to mention that he has a androgynous face which resembles her sisters face. It might be amusing to make him crossdress sometime.

Well, if I did that, I would be literally killed by Masaki-chan and Yayoi-chan though.

“I came here just now. Was watching your fight.”(renji)

“Yeah, I won!”

“Kuhh.”(masaki)

Saying that, he raised his hand in the air. Beside him, Masaki-chan made a regretful face but since it’d only spell more trouble for me if said something stupid, so I kept my mouth shut. After all, they’ll have a rematch sooner or later anyway. I also raised my right hand and did a high five with Souichi. As usual, he didn’t seem to hold back at all making my hand hurt for no reason. I didn’t show it on my face but she must have realized it as Kudou gave a stifled laugh. Goddamn her. She’s unusually receptive only at such weird things. When I gave a light glare to the beautiful maid, she came towards me with a rare amused face. She must have enjoyed teasing Souichi seeing that she didn’t have her usual expressionless face. What a shitty personality. Alongside her, yayoi-chan came walking towards us as well. With Aya already beside me, it felt nice being surrounded by beautiful girls. Kudou is, well, like that though. It’s a pain to know someone true personality as well I guess. Even though her face is good. Just her face, though.

“Long time no see, Renji-san.”(yayoi)

“Yayoi-chan as well, good to see you safe and sound again.”(renji)

“Yes. Thank you for protecting Aya-chan as always.”(yayoi)

As she gave a bow saying that, I felt a bit embarrassed. I was the one who was protected in the end though. But I hesitated to say that as well, and in the end I could only scratch my cheek.

My reaction must have been amusing as Yayoi-chan gave an elegant laugh. Even though she’s not some high noble lady or anything yet Yayoi-chan exuded elegance always. She was a true Yamato Nadeshiko. I guess, it wasn’t weird that someone like her would get the title of [Saint] either. Well, all that instantly disappears when it comes to anything that involves Souichi though.

“You always get provocated so easily by Rin-chan……I was worried, yayoi.”(aya)

“I’m sorry, Aya-chan.”(yayoi)

Aya-chan joined our conversation as well. She didn’t show any signs of being timid though, in fact her smile almost felt like it was still poisonous. Well, she must have known that Kudou was intentionally trying to mess with them when she clung to Souichi. But if you knew, why did you still go along with her anyway? To end up provocated anyway, I guess ‘love is blind’ after all.

As I looked at the children talking with smiles, I felt like I had gotten older. Even though I’m used to this scene. 3 years ago, after getting summoned here, this was just any normal conversation between my comrades. How nostalgic this feels. Must be because I stayed away from them for the past one year. While I was thinking of that, I brought out Ermenhilde from my pocket and gently caressed the medal. Right after getting summoned, nobody thought about the danger we’d be putting our lives at and simply enjoying facing each other with swords. How very nostalgic indeed.

[What happened?]

“No, it’s nothing.”(renji)

I felt a bit sad when I thought of it as well. I couldn’t even properly reply to Ermenhilde’s worried voice. How hopeless am I? Even though I had chosen Ermenhilde above all of them and had put distance between us all. In the end, I’m back here again. I don’t feel bad about it, in fact I am enjoying it as well. It’s fun to adventure alongside Ms Francesca and the others but to be so close with my trusted comrades felt so comfortable. Above all, it made me remind that place I will always return to will always be here.

“Oi Kuuki, do you know where O’brien-san is?”(renji)

“The Commander?”(kuuki)

“I need to meet with him sooner or later after all.”

“That’s true. Though both of you had bad timing, he really has been wanting to meet you again, you know?”

“.....that, sounds really scary on its own though.”

When I said that, Kuuki gave a laugh. Since I received the least amount of abilities from our gifts, I had been taught by O’brien-san the most. He must be laughing remembering that. Goddamn him.

“But, today might be difficult though.”(kuuki)

“Why?”

“It’s been really busy today after all. Must be due to the demon Souichi-kun brought here today, I guess.”

Oh yeah, there was that as well. I see. Recalling that Utano-san seemed to be busy as well, I scratched my head. She must have been looking out for me. Even though she has scary eyes, she’s the kindest of us all after all. Though she’d probably bury me if I said that to her face.

After talking to Kuuki, I decided to slowly walk away without letting the kids happily talking notice me. But, just when I was about to leave the grounds, Aya found me.

“I’ll go with you.”(aya)

“Ah, hm, no, I’ll go alone.”(renji)

“.....I’m not allowed?”

“No.”

Even if you look at me like that, I cannot take her where I’m about to go. If I did, Utano-san really will get angry at me. Aya seemed to understand where I was headed as well since she didn’t insist any further. I have never shown her that place ever but she must be vaguely aware of my destination. Or maybe, she knows very well where exactly I’m going.

Aya wasn’t a child anymore. Souichi and the others weren’t either. A time comes when you have show them the dark side of humans but for now, I want them to happily spend their lives as teenagers. That may be for just my own self-satisfaction though.

“Say, are you free tonight?”(renji)

“Eh? Eh, um??”(Aya)

“How about we go for dinner together?”(renji)

But still, then why do I go through the trouble of following up like this just after I made her feel a bit sad. I’m a bit too clever, if I say so myself. It’s because of things like this that my relationship with both Utano-san and Aya was so unsteady. It’s not like we’re still back to the way we were a year ago either. I just keep on taking advantage of the gentleness of these women.

Doing a complete turnaround from her previous expression, Aya gave a wide smile. Yeah, this definitely suits her better. I suddenly felt gazes at me and on looking around I saw Souichi and Kudou laughing while looking at me. Seriously, what kind of misunderstandings do they have now?

“I need to show myself at Toudou’s place as well after all. Shall we go together?”(renji) (T/N: in case you guys have forgotten, Toudou is the cook of the 13)

“With pleasure!”(aya)

“I see. Then we’ll go there before the sun sets.”

Saying that, I left the grounds. Aya will definitely get teased by Souichi and the others but it only made me feel lighter. The place I’m heading to is a depressing place so I want to be in as high of a mood as possible. As a reward for myself, I’ll also get to go to dinner with a beauty like Aya later as well. So let’s be strong.

[You sure have a way with words.]

“Not really, I didn’t have any ill-intent either. I just didn’t want to leave her feeling down, that’s all.”

Was it just my imagination that I sensed a slight bit of irritation in Ermenhilde’s voice? Was that because I treated Aya like a kid or because I had a date for dinner planned with her?

The place I was heading to was underground. The place was cold and

felt extremely eerie; probably because I have not a single good memory of while being underground. Fighting undeads, getting attacked by slimes, getting drenched in sewage and filth, and almost getting buried alive. Just recalling it all made me truly thank the fact that I was still alive.

[If that was the case, why not just take Aya with you?]

"It's cold underground. I'll be scolded by Utano-san if I let Aya catch a cold or something."

[Don't say things you don't even mean.....It's really painful to be treated like a child you know?]

Did those words come from personal experience, I wonder? Ermenhilde's voice seemed to be gloomy and sad. I wasn't really joking about catching a cold though. When I simply shrugged my shoulders, Ermenhilde gave a fed up sigh.

"But well, to adults, children will always remain children."

Just like how Astraera said that you were precious. But still she.....——-I shook my head, I can't let my thoughts go in that direction. That was what I should have asked her when I lost Eru and gained Ermenhilde but never was able to. I simply did not have the courage to do so. No, I simply couldn't accept what the Demon Lord and the Goddess told me. And even after a year, the Dragon King told me the same thing. I haven't grown at all. I haven't progressed at all.

But soon.....it's about time to finally move ahead. While I'm here in the capital, when there are people who know me by my side, I end up thinking like that. What a useless adult I am. I truly think that from the bottom of my heart. Even Souichi and the others are still giving their all while living in this world.

[What happened?]

"Nothing. I was just thinking that a jail is definitely not a place where you take children."

.

.

.

The people were overrun by the Demon God, they shivered in the freezing cold, their houses were burnt away, their cattle was killed, and they had no choice but to keep on living with very little support. It was considered fortunate to just be alive. Many lost their children and kids lost their parents. People would cooperate with their friends and neighbours, and help each other out. The threat of monsters was still present as ever. And the danger to their life had not disappeared yet either.

But, that doesn't mean that there was no crime in this world. Theft, murder, rape, etc etc. the darkness of human beings was always there. It was an unchangeable fact. If there are rich people then there were also poor people. There are those who wish for money, for blood and for power. It was a neverchanging truth of the world. And just like there are those who don't lose themselves to these thoughts, there will always be those who do.

The stone corridors in the castle were cold but the jails created to imprison criminals felt even colder. As I walked through it while using my winter-use fur mantle to cover my body, the criminals captured in the cells were making noise by hitting the iron bars of their cells. The sound was truly irritating. Since the only source of light was a dim lamp stuck on the wall, I could feel the eyes of the inmates glowing as they tried to attract my attention. The number of cells was not less than 20. I haven't really counted them but in any case, more than half of them were currently occupied by criminals. These were humans who'd hurt people of their own race even though the world was still under the threat of monsters. I know that sometimes there is no choice for people but to take such a path but that doesn't mean I sympathise with them. I'm sure they are also victims of some tragedy but there must be many that were victims of these people as well.

The cells had nothing more than a few blankets to be used and a dirty basin as a replacement for toilets. And every cell was filled with 5-10

criminals each. These criminals ranged from humans, dwarves and beastmen as well. There weren't any elves probably because since they can use magic, they need to be put into jails made for magic users. The freezing cold must be deadly but they're paying for their own mistakes. Even after saving the world, saving humans, we cannot save criminals no matter what. What an empty feeling.

I started feeling a bit down again. I was right to have not brought Aya here. It's still far too early for that child. The same goes for Souichi and others.

[As usual, it's a really depressing an dark place.]

"It is a jail after all."

That's the kind of place a jail is. It can't be helped. I felt like Ermenhilde's voice tried to imply to me that she wanted to return as fast possible. Well, even I wouldn't be here if I didn't have something to do after all.

As I kept on walking through the corridor while ignoring the pleading cries from the criminals, a much more noticeably sturdy jail came into my sights. There were five of those. The bars of the cell weren't made from iron but from Mithril instead. And these bars were engraved with complicated looking patterns and letters forming a spell. I couldn't read them but I think they're letters used by Elves. The magic engraved is [Sealing]. Inside those, the use of magic was impossible. It's a place to keep magic using criminals. They were big enough to have ten people inside one cell at the same time. I could also see one of those cells was currently occupied by a few people as well. When I came closer, they realized of my presence as well as one soldier opened up the cell gate for me.

".....Yamada-kun.."

"Hello, Utano-san."

Saying that, I entered. Inside the cell, there was also an aged knight and 5 armoured soldiers behind him. And Utano-san as well. The last one was ——I couldn't tell properly due to the dim lighting but it was probably that

demon we captured back at the Magic City. His hands had been bound behind his back and he was currently lying flat on the ground of the cell. The place near his stomach had blood seeping out. Seeing as no treatment had been done, it's probably as a means to torture him. Confirming the current situation with a quick glance, I turned towards the most highest ranking aged knight standing here.

"It has been a long time, O'brien-dono."(renji)

"You shouldn't bow your heads to others so easily, Renji-dono."(ob)
(T/N:'ob' for O'brien)

But still, such formal way of talking really doesn't suit us. O'brien-san must be thinking of the same thing as he cleared his throat and shook his body a bit. The full body mithril armour made a noise as it moved. He's one head shorter than me but I'm hundred percent sure than underneath that armour is a body far more muscular and well built than mine. The full body armour he's wearing would probably make me unable to even move if I tried wearing it.

Imnesia kingdom Knight Order, Knight Commander O'brien Arbelia. Currently at the age of 48, he was still a man to fight directly at the front lines of a battle. Well respected by even the king himself, he was also adored by every soldier. He was the centre piece of the whole Knight Order, one could say. By the way he's also something like my master who taught me how to fight. I can still remember how he used to train me from day to night, continuously striking at me regardless of the fact that I was one those supposed heroes. Souichi and others could already fight above the level of a normal soldier right from the start but he was worried about me since I couldn't. By the way, at night I would be the great library to learn about this world's language and script, its history, ecology of monsters, basics of magic etc; all of that was hammered into my head..... It's amazing I actually lasted till the end. Well done, me. When I think back about it I realize how much overworked I was. Well, thanks to that we were able to survive our journey and can now live on like this though.

"You should consider your position more, Saviour."(ob)

[Seriously.]

“No, well, acting prideful and full of swagger really doesn’t suit me, I think.”(renji)

“No need to be full of swagger. Everyone knows that doesn’t you at all. But, it’s important to be prideful though. No matter how much you try to run away from it, you will always remain as one of the 13 Heroes after all.”(ob)

I felt my mouth cramp a bit when he said ‘runaway’. Well he’s true though. Whether it be Fafnir or him, people older than me are really not gentle towards me. But well, that’d be troubling in its own way I guess.

Unable to refute what he said, I averted my gaze and looked towards the demon lying on the ground. His expression was one of surprise for a second, then quickly changed to that of one filled with hatred and anger.

“For one, I am just an adventurer now and you, O’brien-san, are the commander of the Knights Order after all. Don’t you have a higher status than me?”(renji)

“Compared to a aged knight to the hero who saved the world, it’s you with the higher status, you fool.”(ob)

I felt a bit pity for the soldiers standing behind him panicking and confused from our conversation. For the time being, I’d be happier if you’d just ignore me and continue with the torture though. No wait, it’s not like I enjoy seeing that or anything either though.

I wonder what she thought about me as Utano-san came close to me and whispered into my ears.

“Why are you here?”(yuuko)

“If this is related to the Demon God, I come under people concerned with it after all.”(renji)

Even if I run away from the title of a Hero, I don’t want to run away from the Demon God. Not because I’m an Apostle of the goddess, neither because I’m a god-slayer.....simply because I’m a human who was

summoned to this world. Because that's the path she chose. Because that is what she wished for. And because that was her wish, that I was unable to fulfil.

"Yamada Renji!!"(demon)

"……again, eh?"

I wonder if it's popular among demons to call me like that with my full name nowadays. I feel like Shelfa……the Demon Lord also called me by my full name. Ignoring his hatred filled gaze, I took a few steps back. And as if exchanging for me, O'brien-san and the soldiers came forward. It made me feel sick just thinking about what's going to happen next but still, I must face it.

"As usual, you're hated by demons with a passion, eh?"

"Well, I did kill their God after all."

I killed the God they worshipped. There should be no limit to their hatred for me. To us humans, that'd be like demons killing the Goddess. Nobody would want to accept that, nobody would even want to acknowledge something like that. That's why they'll point their hatred towards the person responsible. Even though we are always trying to kill each other, I still can't get used to getting hated like this though. But still, this is fine I think. As long as that hatred is pointed towards just me and not towards Utano-san or Souichi and others.

Utano-san gave a sigh but O'brien-san paid no heed to it as he kicked the demon on the ground. There were no civil rights here. Humans, Demihumans, Beastmen and Demons were in relationship of hating each other and killing each other. It's already decided what'll happen when you get captured like this.

Even back in our world, during the world wars, people did unspeakable and inhumane things. And considering here they aren't even of the same race, there were no constraints in releasing your hatred. I can understand why the Goddess was so worried. Will a day come when no one will work together with each other anymroe?

“So, did you learn something?”(renji)

“Nothing at all. His mouth is tight shut.”(ob)

[Not surprising really.]

I agreed with Ermenhilde’s words. That demon will be killed in the end anyway. He won’t give out info advantageous to us at any cost.

Was a way to gently persuade him otherwise really impossible? When I looked towards Utano-san, she simply shook her head. In the first place, there’s no guarantee that he actually has any info that could satisfy us. Controlling that many monsters and even having the ability to summon a demon God’s descendant was real but everything else seemed to shoddy. This demon must be a disposable pawn. Maybe he was simply working solo. If not, Souichi should have been attacked while he brought the demon here.

O’brien-san seemed to understand that fact as well. After interrogating a bit more, he’ll probably end it.

“Oh, right.”(renji)

Recalling something, I brought out the fragment of crystal I had. It’s the fragment of the crystal that had Solnea sleeping in it. There’s too much I don’t know about this, so I should ask about it. I squatted down near him and showed him the crystal.

“This seem familiar to you?”(renji)

“.....what’s that?”(ob)

“A little something.”(renji)

While listening to O’brien-san I studied the demon’s expression closely. It was completely dyed in hatred towards me and showed no change.

“What about the name Solnea?”(renji)

“Don’t know. Even if I did, who would tell that to the likes of you?”(demon)

“I don’t trust your words either but, well, your emotions show on your

face so it doesn't really matter."(renji)

Saying that, I stood up.

No luck here, I guess. While playing with the crystal fragment with my fingers, I thought about what that girl could be. Since there is literally no info about her, I won't suddenly find an answer either. I wonder what Utano-san was thinking as she gave a sidelong glance towards me. Is she being suspicious of me again?

Saying that she had work to do now, Utano-san drove me out of her room. As I left the warm room, the corridor felt colder than normal making me rub my hands together.

I recalled Utano-san's expression while she drove me out of her room. I feel like her gaze was 3 times more colder than usual. Did Solnea's case weigh that much on her mind. There are hardly many things that can make Utano-san worry though.

Sighing, and thinking about some way to lift her mood again, I headed towards the Training grounds. Might as well go and meet Souichi and the others as well. I should show my face to O'brien-san as well. Since he was busy with his Knight duties and I spent more time at the guild, we somehow had yet to meet. If I delayed it any longer I feel like he'll get angry and yell at me.

Even though he's reaching his fifties, he's still active in the field. I can't even tell what would happen when he gets angry.

When I showed up at the grounds, Kuuki came towards me with a surprised face. Aya also came alongside him.

When I saw Aya, I recalled my conversation with Utano-san.....about Solnea. For a second, I couldn't think of a way to start a conversation with her. In the meantime, Aya came right in front of me and looked up towards me. Her side ponytail swayed around energetically showing off her girlish charm.

"Did something happen?"(aya)

"Hm?"

“No, you look like you’re worrying about something.”(aya)

I am. Yes. Wait, can I say that I am actually worried?

I recalled how Utano-san questioned me about various things regarding my relationship with Solnea. Seriously, I met her just today. In fact, I didn’t just ‘meet’ her like normal people do either. It’d be better to say that I took her under my protection for now.

While thinking of that, I gave a smile towards Aya as thanks for worrying about me. At that, Aya also blushed and gave a shy smile. Really, Aya’s pureness heals me.

“So, what happened?”

“Oh yeah, Kuuki, just listen to this..”(renji)

“.....uwahh. I don’t want to.”(kuuki)

While getting healed by Aya, I tried to speak to Kuuki but he just made an unpleasant face openly. Goddamnit, this heartless bastard.

Back then, he used to listen to me with such a happy smile. It must be that. He must have gotten complacent after getting in the relationship with the princess. I guess that’s also growth in a way. How envious. Just get married already. Then, I’ll give all my blessings (curses) to you.

“I helped someone and ended up worsening Utano-san’s mood.”(renji)

“Just quietly apologise to her.”

“.....”

“It must be another woman again, right?”

He didn’t even think before speaking as if it actually was all my fault. Oh well, I guess this isn’t the first time something like this has happened so I guess they are not to blame.

To save someone, you need power. Whether it be fighting power, monetary, or fame/reputation. It is definitely necessary. Back then, I was lacking in all of them yet wanted to save others so I ended up trying to save them all anyway. As a result I ended up displeasuring Utano-san

countless times. And I can't even deny that none of those were women related matters either.

I am a man after all. I can't help but lend a hand to a woman in distress. Makes me motivated as well. All the more so if it is a beauty. No, I did save many men as well, okay? But still, I guess my image inside Utano-san's head is still that of a 'womanizer'. Even though it's mostly unintentional.

".....What kind of a person do you take me for?"(renji)

What the hell did he mean by 'must be another woman' and 'again', huh? It's like I only try to save women. I actually do try to save people regardless of their gender you know? What a rude guy. While I was talking to Kuuki, my right sleeve was lightly pulled. It was Aya.

But right now, Aya was not showing her smile from before and was looking at me with a somewhat troubled face.

[What is it, Aya?]

"Ah, umm....."

I'm guessing she must be curious about the person I saved.

She wants to ask but must be feeling embarrassed to do so. Her reaction felt so cute that even I felt that it was bad of me to just keep on looking at her like this and not doing anything.

[Don't trouble Aya too much, Renji.]

"I don't intend to. I'll answer as long as she properly asks."(renji)

"Uuu....."

[That's exactly what's troubling her you fool, seriously!]

When I gave a laugh seeing Aya at a loss for words after what Ermenhilde said, Ermenhilde sighed at me. Looking at our exchange, Kuuki gave a wry smile as well. Aya finally calmed down as well as her expression became lighter after taking a deep breath. Just then, after a sound of explosion rand followed by the cheering of the soldiers. Judging from the people at the grounds right now and the sound that just came, it

must be Masaki-chan's demonic sword. It must be one her abilities.

I'd be worried if her opponent was someone normal but if its Souichi, he'd be able to parry her properly. The other two with me seemed to be of the same opinion as they didn't seem to show any signs of panicking. We casually moved to become a part of the encircling crowd of soldiers as well. Surprised from my sudden appearance maybe, the crowd of soldiers split in two to give me a way through. Feeling all of their gazes accumulate towards me, I scratched my head in displeasure and flinched for a moment. Kuuki and Aya seemed to be used to this as they walked down the path created by the soldiers normally. As I quickly followed those two, I saw Souichi and Masaki-chan exchanging sword blows in the centre. In their hands were a blue Holy sword and a scarlet demonic sword. Well, in this case, it'd be appropriate to call hers a Demonic katana.

Yayoi-chan and Kudou were standing a bit far away while talking with each other. As usual, yayoi-chan's smile seemed to be a bit scary. Well leaving those two aside, I turned towards the two who were slashing at each other at a speed difficult to follow with human eyes.

With a shrill sound, sparks flew over the field and ground was gouged out every time they moved around while kicking the field. Seeing as neither of their swords were enveloped in the usual blue flames and scarlet flames, I could tell that they weren't even serious right now. They are just testing each other. Something like that. But even at that, every slash split the air and blasted the stone ground. The soldiers around had taken measures to not get damaged but it still looked dangerous for them. I don't know what Kudou said to incite them but right now, both of them were only trying to see each other's growth. Looking closely, both of them were actually smiling at each other while using deadly slashes at each other. They are confident that their opponent could dodge attacks of this level.

We were foreigners. Summoned from another world, receiving the divine protection of the goddess, and received powers and abilities alien to the residents of this world. That gift was much lesser inside me but even I

would never lose to some random guy. But the remaining twelve were different. Especially these two in front of me, even more so. Even though they are holding back, they were still at a level not a single person here could hope to reach. In close combat, not even Kuuki or Aya can win against those two. They lack people who possess the same level of strength. That's why they enjoy training against each other so much. The shrill sound of swords clashing and the roaring explosions of flames made my eardrums vibrate. Did they start concentrating more, I am unable to catch even the sound of clashing swords right now. Every move was so fast. While swing their sword at a speed that left after images, they kept on fighting while smiling and truly enjoying it. But even that won't continue forever. Masaki-chan was the first one to realize my presence. Even though they were fighting at unimaginable speeds, I could tell that our eyes met for a split second. And at that split second, her movements dulled. Souichi wasn't naïve enough to let go of that opening. That guy has timid personality but he would never ever let an opening in the enemy's defences go unpunished. He had the strength to fully utilise that opening in his favour. He possessed the sense to know exactly when to go for the finishing blow. And following it, Souichi rushed in towards Masaki-chan. She countered with a super fast thrust aiming for is head.

The finale came in an instant. Slipping through the thrust of the katana, the blue blade was thrust right underneath Masaki-chan's throat. The sound of swords stopped and silence came over the ground.

"I surrender. It's my loss."(masaki)

"Alright!"(souichi)

The silence was broken by Masaki-chan's surrender and Souichi's shout of joy. After all that action, they seem to be only slightly out of breath. Their bodies made them almost unable to feel fatigue. The remaining soldiers simply stared at them in a daze. This was what Hero was like. The Brave who saved the world. The humans who were the hope of the people. In their gazes were feelings of respect and aspiration, and excitement.

After a while, the soldiers returned back to their training while heated

up from the battle they saw. The Brave and The Demonic Sword user. The battle between the two Heroes that stood at the front lines swing their swords during the journey to subjugate the Demon God. It's only normal to get motivated seeing such a battle.

"Yo."(renji)

"Mouu, don't appear so suddenly just when it was getting good, Yamada-san."(masaki)

"…….was that my fault?"(renji)

"Just when I was getting all excited, I lost all concentration after all."

[It's your fault to have lost concentration though, isn't it?]

"Muuu."

Cutely puffing her cheeks, she, Hisaki Masaki, quickly returned to showing a sweet energetic smile. The Demonic Sword user who wished the goddess for [A sword that can tear through even fate]. If in recall correctly, her house was a shrine but she herself lacked any such ladylike manners. If I had to say, she was more like the big sister type of girl. Even now, she was simply laughing off her loss to Souichi. Inside, she must be planning to take revenge for the loss later though.

She's a sore loser but strong willed. I think back then she used to say "I'm a Miko!" a lot. Well with her long black hair, a miko dress would definitely suit her a lot. But her personality is another case altogether. She's the type of woman who's idea of fun is to fight Souichi with swords. And she's easy to read. To speak specifically, she's the type to quickly take action and jump directly at a horde of monster and start swinging around her sword. She's actually more manly than even me, in a sense.

"Huh, Renji-niichan. When did you come here?"(souichi)

And Souichi was surprised, finally realizing I was here. Just how concentrated to the fight were you? Well, that's a part of his strength though. But still, seeing him stand beside Masaki-chan, did this guy really not grow much in terms of height in the past one year? He's actually a bit shorter than her. Not to mention that he has a androgynous face which

resembles her sisters face. It might be amusing to make him crossdress sometime.

Well, if I did that, I would be literally killed by Masaki-chan and Yayoi-chan though.

“I came here just now. Was watching your fight.”(renji)

“Yeah, I won!”

“Kuhh.”(masaki)

Saying that, he raised his hand in the air. Beside him, Masaki-chan made a regretful face but since it’d only spell more trouble for me if said something stupid, so I kept my mouth shut. After all, they’ll have a rematch sooner or later anyway. I also raised my right hand and did a high five with Souichi. As usual, he didn’t seem to hold back at all making my hand hurt for no reason. I didn’t show it on my face but she must have realized it as Kudou gave a stifled laugh. Goddamn her. She’s unusually receptive only at such weird things. When I gave a light glare to the beautiful maid, she came towards me with a rare amused face. She must have enjoyed teasing Souichi seeing that she didn’t have her usual expressionless face. What a shitty personality. Alongside her, yayoi-chan came walking towards us as well. With Aya already beside me, it felt nice being surrounded by beautiful girls. Kudou is, well, like that though. It’s a pain to know someone true personality as well I guess. Even though her face is good. Just her face, though.

“Long time no see, Renji-san.”(yayoi)

“Yayoi-chan as well, good to see you safe and sound again.”(renji)

“Yes. Thank you for protecting Aya-chan as always.”(yayoi)

As she gave a bow saying that, I felt a bit embarrassed. I was the one who was protected in the end though. But I hesitated to say that as well, and in the end I could only scratch my cheek.

My reaction must have been amusing as Yayoi-chan gave an elegant laugh. Even though she’s not some high noble lady or anything yet Yayoi-chan exuded elegance always. She was a true Yamato Nadeshiko. I guess,

it wasn't weird that someone like her would get the title of [Saint] either. Well, all that instantly disappears when it comes to anything that involves Souichi though.

"You always get provocated so easily by Rin-chan.....I was worried, yayoi."(aya)

"I'm sorry, Aya-chan."(yayoi)

Aya-chan joined our conversation as well. She didn't show any signs of being timid though, in fact her smile almost felt like it was still poisonous. Well, she must have known that Kudou was intentionally trying to mess with them when she clung to Souichi. But if you knew, why did you still go along with her anyway? To end up provocated anyway, I guess 'love is blind' after all.

As I looked at the children talking with smiles, I felt like I had gotten older. Even though I'm used to this scene. 3 years ago, after getting summoned here, this was just any normal conversation between my comrades. How nostalgic this feels. Must be because I stayed away from them for the past one year. While I was thinking of that, I brought out Ermenhilde from my pocket and gently caressed the medal. Right after getting summoned, nobody thought about the danger we'd be putting our lives at and simply enjoying facing each other with swords. How very nostalgic indeed.

[What happened?]

"No, it's nothing."(renji)

I felt a bit sad when I thought of it as well. I couldn't even properly reply to Ermenhilde's worried voice. How hopeless am I? Even though I had chosen Ermenhilde above all of them and had put distance between us all. In the end, I'm back here again. I don't feel bad about it, in fact I am enjoying it as well. It's fun to adventure alongside Ms Francesca and the others but to be so close with my trusted comrades felt so comfortable. Above all, it made me remind that place I will always return to will always be here.

"Oi Kuuki, do you know where O'brien-san is?"(renji)

“The Commander?”(kuuki)

“I need to meet with him sooner or later after all.”

“That’s true. Though both of you had bad timing, he really has been wanting to meet you again, you know?”

“.....that, sounds really scary on its own though.”

When I said that, Kuuki gave a laugh. Since I received the least amount of abilities from our gifts, I had been taught by O’brien-san the most. He must be laughing remembering that. Goddamn him.

“But, today might be difficult though.”(kuuki)

“Why?”

“It’s been really busy today after all. Must be due to the demon Souichi-kun brought here today, I guess.”

Oh yeah, there was that as well. I see. Recalling that Utano-san seemed to be busy as well, I scratched my head. She must have been looking out for me. Even though she has scary eyes, she’s the kindest of us all after all. Though she’d probably bury me if I said that to her face.

After talking to Kuuki, I decided to slowly walk away without letting the kids happily talking notice me. But, just when I was about to leave the grounds, Aya found me.

“I’ll go with you.”(aya)

“Ah, hm, no, I’ll go alone.”(renji)

“.....I’m not allowed?”

“No.”

Even if you look at me like that, I cannot take her where I’m about to go. If I did, Utano-san really will get angry at me. Aya seemed to understand where I was headed as well since she didn’t insist any further. I have never shown her that place ever but she must be vaguely aware of my destination. Or maybe, she knows very well where exactly I’m going.

Aya wasn’t a child anymore. Souichi and the others weren’t either. A

time comes when you have show them the dark side of humans but for now, I want them to happily spend their lives as teenagers. That may be for just my own self-satisfaction though.

"Say, are you free tonight?"(renji)

"Eh? Eh, um??"(Aya)

"How about we go for dinner together?"(renji)

But still, then why do I go through the trouble of following up like this just after I made her feel a bit sad. I'm a bit too clever, if I say so myself. It's because of things like this that my relationship with both Utano-san and Aya was so unsteady. It's not like we're still back to the way we were a year ago either. I just keep on taking advantage of the gentleness of these women.

Doing a complete turnaround from her previous expression, Aya gave a wide smile. Yeah, this definitely suits her better. I suddenly felt gazes at me and on looking around I saw Souichi and Kudou laughing while looking at me. Seriously, what kind of misunderstandings do they have now?

"I need to show myself at Toudou's place as well after all. Shall we go together?"(renji) (T/N: in case you guys have forgotten, Toudou is the cook of the 13)

"With pleasure!"(aya)

"I see. Then we'll go there before the sun sets."

Saying that, I left the grounds. Aya will definitely get teased by Souichi and the others but it only made me feel lighter. The place I'm heading to is a depressing place so I want to be in as high of a mood as possible. As a reward for myself, I'll also get to go to dinner with a beauty like Aya later as well. So let's be strong.

[You sure have a way with words.]

"Not really, I didn't have any ill-intent either. I just didn't want to leave her feeling down, that's all."

Was it just my imagination that I sensed a slight bit of irritation in Ermenhilde's voice? Was that because I treated Aya like a kid or because I had a date for dinner planned with her?

The place I was heading to was underground. The place was cold and felt extremely eerie; probably because I have not a single good memory of while being underground. Fighting undeads, getting attacked by slimes, getting drenched in sewage and filth, and almost getting buried alive. Just recalling it all made me truly thank the fact that I was still alive.

[If that was the case, why not just take Aya with you?]

"It's cold underground. I'll be scolded by Utano-san if I let Aya catch a cold or something."

[Don't say things you don't even mean.....It's really painful to be treated like a child you know?]

Did those words come from personal experience, I wonder? Ermenhilde's voice seemed to be gloomy and sad. I wasn't really joking about catching a cold though. When I simply shrugged my shoulders, Ermenhilde gave a fed up sigh.

"But well, to adults, children will always remain children."

Just like how Astraera said that you were precious. But still she.....——I shook my head, I can't let my thoughts go in that direction. That was what I should have asked her when I lost Eru and gained Ermenhilde but never was able to. I simply did not have the courage to do so. No, I simply couldn't accept what the Demon Lord and the Goddess told me. And even after a year, the Dragon King told me the same thing. I haven't grown at all. I haven't progressed at all.

But soon.....it's about time to finally move ahead. While I'm here in the capital, when there are people who know me by my side, I end up thinking like that. What a useless adult I am. I truly think that from the bottom of my heart. Even Souichi and the others are still giving their all while living in this world.

[What happened?]

“Nothing. I was just thinking that a jail is definitely not a place where you take children.”

.

.

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The people were overrun by the Demon God, they shivered in the freezing cold, their houses were burnt away, their cattle was killed, and they had no choice but to keep on living with very little support. It was considered fortunate to just be alive. Many lost their children and kids lost their parents. People would cooperate with their friends and neighbours, and help each other out. The threat of monsters was still present as ever. And the danger to their life had not disappeared yet either.

But, that doesn’t mean that there was no crime in this world. Theft, murder, rape, etc etc. the darkness of human beings was always there. It was an unchangeable fact. If there are rich people then there were also poor people. There are those who wish for money, for blood and for power. It was a neverchanging truth of the world. And just like there are those who don’t lose themselves to these thoughts, there will always be those who do.

The stone corridors in the castle were cold but the jails created to imprison criminals felt even colder. As I walked through it while using my winter-use fur mantle to cover my body, the criminals captured in the cells were making noise by hitting the iron bars of their cells. The sound was truly irritating. Since the only source of light was a dim lamp stuck on the wall, I could feel the eyes of the inmates glowing as they tried to attract my attention. The number of cells was not less than 20. I haven’t really counted them but in any case, more than half of them were currently occupied by criminals. These were humans who’d hurt people of their own race even though the world was still under the threat of monsters. I know that sometimes there is no choice for people but to take such a path but that doesn’t mean I sympathise with them. I’m sure they

are also victims of some tragedy but there must be many that were victims of these people as well.

The cells had nothing more than a few blankets to be used and a dirty basin as a replacement for toilets. And every cell was filled with 5-10 criminals each. These criminals ranged from humans, dwarves and beastmen as well. There weren't any elves probably because since they can use magic, they need to be put into jails made for magic users. The freezing cold must be deadly but they're paying for their own mistakes. Even after saving the world, saving humans, we cannot save criminals no matter what. What an empty feeling.

I started feeling a bit down again. I was right to have not brought Aya here. It's still far too early for that child. The same goes for Souichi and others.

[As usual, it's a really depressing an dark place.]

"It is a jail after all."

That's the kind of place a jail is. It can't be helped. I felt like Ermenhilde's voice tried to imply to me that she wanted to return as fast possible. Well, even I wouldn't be here if I didn't have something to do after all.

As I kept on walking through the corridor while ignoring the pleading cries from the criminals, a much more noticeably sturdy jail came into my sights. There were five of those. The bars of the cell weren't made from iron but from Mithril instead. And these bars were engraved with complicated looking patterns and letters forming a spell. I couldn't read them but I think they're letters used by Elves. The magic engraved is [Sealing]. Inside those, the use of magic was impossible. It's a place to keep magic using criminals. They were big enough to have ten people inside one cell at the same time. I could also see one of those cells was currently occupied by a few people as well. When I came closer, they realized of my presence as well as one soldier opened up the cell gate for me.

"……Yamada-kun.."

“Hello, Utano-san.”

Saying that, I entered. Inside the cell, there was also an aged knight and 5 armoured soldiers behind him. And Utano-san as well. The last one was ––I couldn’t tell properly due to the dim lighting but it was probably that demon we captured back at the Magic City. His hands had been bound behind his back and he was currently lying flat on the ground of the cell. The place near his stomach had blood seeping out. Seeing as no treatment had been done, it’s probably as a means to torture him. Confirming the current situation with a quick glance, I turned towards the most highest ranking aged knight standing here.

“It has been a long time, O’brien-dono.”(renji)

“You shouldn’t bow your heads to others so easily, Renji-dono.”(ob) (T/N:’ob’ for O’brien)

But still, such formal way of talking really doesn’t suit us. O’brien-san must be thinking of the same thing as he cleared his throat and shook his body a bit. The full body mithril armour made a noise as it moved. He’s one head shorter than me but I’m hundred percent sure than underneath that armour is a body far more muscular and well built than mine. The full body armour he’s wearing would probably make me unable to even move if I tried wearing it.

Imnesia kingdom Knight Order, Knight Commander O’brien Arbelia. Currently at the age of 48, he was still a man to fight directly at the front lines of a battle. Well respected by even the king himself, he was also adored by every soldier. He was the centre piece of the whole Knight Order, one could say. By the way he’s also something like my master who taught me how to fight. I can still remember how he used to train me from day to night, continuously striking at me regardless of the fact that I was one those supposed heroes. Souichi and others could already fight above the level of a normal soldier right from the start but he was worried about me since I couldn’t. By the way, at night I would be the great library to learn about this world’s language and script, its history, ecology of monsters, basics of magic etc; all of that was hammered into my head..... It’s amazing I actually lasted till the end. Well done, me.

When I think back about it I realize how much overworked I was. Well, thanks to that we were able to survive our journey and can now live on like this though.

"You should consider your position more, Saviour."(ob)

[Seriously.]

"No, well, acting prideful and full of swagger really doesn't suit me, I think."(renji)

"No need to be full of swagger. Everyone knows that doesn't you at all. But, it's important to be prideful though. No matter how much you try to run away from it, you will always remain as one of the 13 Heroes after all."(ob)

I felt my mouth cramp a bit when he said 'runaway'. Well he's true though. Whether it be Fafnir or him, people older than me are really not gentle towards me. But well, that'd be troubling in its own way I guess.

Unable to refute what he said, I averted my gaze and looked towards the demon lying on the ground. His expression was one of surprise for a second, then quickly changed to that of one filled with hatred and anger.

"For one, I am just an adventurer now and you, O'brien-san, are the commander of the Knights Order after all. Don't you have a higher status than me?"(renji)

"Compared to a aged knight to the hero who saved the world, it's you with the higher status, you fool."(ob)

I felt a bit pity for the soldiers standing behind him panicking and confused from our conversation. For the time being, I'd be happier if you'd just ignore me and continue with the torture though. No wait, it's not like I enjoy seeing that or anything either though.

I wonder what she thought about me as Utano-san came close to me and whispered into my ears.

"Why are you here?"(yuuko)

"If this is related to the Demon God, I come under people concerned

with it after all."(renji)

Even if I run away from the title of a Hero, I don't want to run away from the Demon God. Not because I'm an Apostle of the goddess, neither because I'm a god-slayer.....simply because I'm a human who was summoned to this world. Because that's the path she chose. Because that is what she wished for. And because that was her wish, that I was unable to fulfil.

"Yamada Renji!!"(demon)

".....again, eh?"

I wonder if it's popular among demons to call me like that with my full name nowadays. I feel like Shelfa.....the Demon Lord also called me by my full name. Ignoring his hatred filled gaze, I took a few steps back. And as if exchanging for me, O'brien-san and the soldiers came forward. It made me feel sick just thinking about what's going to happen next but still, I must face it.

"As usual, you're hated by demons with a passion, eh?"

"Well, I did kill their God after all."

I killed the God they worshipped. There should be no limit to their hatred for me. To us humans, that'd be like demons killing the Goddess. Nobody would want to accept that, nobody would even want to acknowledge something like that. That's why they'll point their hatred towards the person responsible. Even though we are always trying to kill each other, I still can't get used to getting hated like this though. But still, this is fine I think. As long as that hatred is pointed towards just me and not towards Utano-san or Souichi and others.

Utano-san gave a sigh but O'brien-san paid no heed to it as he kicked the demon on the ground. There were no civil rights here. Humans, Demihumans, Beastmen and Demons were in relationship of hating each other and killing each other. It's already decided what'll happen when you get captured like this.

Even back in our world, during the world wars, people did unspeakable

and inhumane things. And considering here they aren't even of the same race, there were no constraints in releasing your hatred. I can understand why the Goddess was so worried. Will a day come when no one will work together with each other anymroe?

"So, did you learn something?"(renji)

"Nothing at all. His mouth is tight shut."(ob)

[Not surprising really.]

I agreed with Ermenhilde's words. That demon will be killed in the end anyway. He won't give out info advantageous to us at any cost.

Was a way to gently persuade him otherwise really impossible? When I looked towards Utano-san, she simply shook her head. In the first place, there's no guarantee that he actually has any info that could satisfy us. Controlling that many monsters and even having the ability to summon a demon God's descendant was real but everything else seemed to shoddy. This demon must be a disposable pawn. Maybe he was simply working solo. If not, Souichi should have been attacked while he brought the demon here.

O'brien-san seemed to understand that fact as well. After interrogating a bit more, he'll probably end it.

"Oh, right."(renji)

Recalling something, I brought out the fragment of crystal I had. It's the fragment of the crystal that had Solnea sleeping in it. There's too much I don't know about this, so I should ask about it. I squatted down near him and showed him the crystal.

"This seem familiar to you?"(renji)

".....what's that?"(ob)

"A little something."(renji)

While listening to O'brien-san I studied the demon's expression closely. It was completely dyed in hatred towards me and showed no change.

"What about the name Solnea?"(renji)

“Don’t know. Even if I did, who would tell that to the likes of you?”(demon)

“I don’t trust your words either but, well, your emotions show on your face so it doesn’t really matter.”(renji)

Saying that, I stood up.

No luck here, I guess. While playing with the crystal fragment with my fingers, I thought about what that girl could be. Since there is literally no info about her, I won’t suddenly find an answer either. I wonder what Utano-san was thinking as she gave a sidelong glance towards me. Is she being suspicious of me again?

Chapter 42: Fighting Tournament (1)

My right shoulder that had been hit just now felt hot due to the pain and continued robbing my concentration. It's been 1 week since we have been summoned to this world. For the past few days, I have been practicing how to use a sword during the day.

At the centre of the training ground, I looked at the middle aged knight standing in front of me as I panted for breath. Whether it be the other soldiers practicing here or Souichi and the others, all of them are more used to using weapons than me. They seemed much natural at it than me. And all of them were looking at me, with inquisitiveness.

While holding the dull edged training-use sword with both hands, I adjusted my breathing.

I took deep breaths thrice; my heart started beating faster, as if asking me to take a break already. But ignoring it, I took a stance with the sword. Wearing the mithril armor, the aged knight's seemed to be not tired at all as he swung around his training sword, checking its condition. In fact, he seemed to be having fun. He was enjoying practicing with me. Even though I was beaten around all over the place, getting blown away, making my body hurt like hell. The sword he held was thicker and longer than mine as well. Even though it should be so much more heavier, he seemed to be having an easy time with it. This guy is definitely not normal. This over energetic, contrary to his age, knight's name was O'brien Arbelia.

"Good good. It's nice to be young, eh. I was worried that you'd be all cocky since you are titled a hero but not bad, you have some guts."(ob)

"Why, thank you."(renji)

"Kuku. It's not always that I compliment someone, you know? You should be more happy, yamada-dono."

"At night, I'll secretly get happy about this alone."

Few days after getting summoned to this world, I learnt many things

while fighting with this old man. This man was a bully.

If I were to relax from those words, he would beat the shit out of me, no questions asked. And as usual, I'd end up rolling on the ground. Such a precise vision rose in my head that my face cramped a bit.

Even though he's shorter than me, when facing him like this, I'm the one who feels smaller. His presence and pressure was in a different level. He wasn't a human like me who depended on cheats given by the goddess to fight. His strength came from his mental and physical skills he forged through years of continuous training. He held such things with him.

My body hurts like hell, and I'm really tired but I'm still thankful to him for training me. Other soldiers would always hold back against me out of formality and Souichi and others were so strong that it wouldn't even be called training.

"C'mon, start again."(ob)

"……guh."

As if taunting me, his sword's tip swayed around. Will he rush towards me, or will he try to over pressure me mentally. I wonder if my hesitating reactions were funny as O'brien-san gave a short laugh.

Due to his sword's tip being in the way, I couldn't close in on him and everytime he took a step forward I ended up taking one back. I know this will end up with me being beaten around again if it continues like this but my body just didn't move. Even if it was just a blunt sword for training, it still hurt when I got hit, and above that, there was the fear that with O'brien-san's strength, he could cut through me, flesh and bones, even with this.

"Yamada-san, do your best!!"

"Commander, show us your cool side once again!"

Hearing the latter words, O'brien-san casually waved his hand towards them. How relaxed. Even with me as an opponent, I guess he doesn't really need to focus that much.

Souichi called my name as well but I didn't have the composure to reply back. Just focusing at the distance between us alone was already more than I could handle right now. Sweat dripped down my cheek as I put more strength in my grip holding the sword.

"Oioi, we're just training, not trying to kill each other. Be more at ease."

"——even if you say that."

"You don't retreat yet don't face forward to take the initiative either. What you lack, first and foremost, is resolve."

Being told that, I gulped the saliva in my mouth. Yeah, that's right. I recalled the events that led to me getting trained by him. In this world, filled with monsters, danger at every corner, and where death is always by your side, to survive in such a world, and so that I don't become a burden, I wished to become stronger.

Hearing O'brien-san's words, I breathed out and calmed my mind. I couldn't calm myself completely but I resolved myself. I stepped forward. I faced his sword. To cut, get cut, kill, get killed. A battle with lives on the line. I still lacked the full resolve to do that but at this moment, I stepped forward.

"here I come."(renji)

"No need for an announcement. Just come at me, you fool."

O'brien-san took a stance. That said, he only put his sword on his shoulder. It was his natural stance. It seemed to lack strength, yet the pressure only increased. This man's sword was incredible. Every single attack was a sure kill swing. If you took it on, you'll be destroyed along with your sword. You'll get cut apart with your armour. It would be suicide. But I lacked the ability to dodge it as well. But even then, I have no choice but to step forward. To prove that I have the resolve.

I wonder if he was aware of my thoughts, as his face showed lots of composure. While giving an enjoying laugh, he remained calm as always. Facing him, I rushed in straightforward. The goddess's divine protection and the power of the cheat were both almost non-existent in me right

now. I only had physical ability slightly better than normal. And as I rushed in with all my strength, the old man very calmly took action. Just when I thought that his sword moved, the very next moment he struck it on the ground. Dust cloud rose to block my vision.

But, I had seen through that attack. Turning around towards my blind spot towards my right shoulder, I gripped my sword tightly. I hesitated for a second. Pointing a sword towards a human still tired me mentally. But I let go of those thoughts, and swung my sword. With a clank, a shock that almost numbed my hand ran through. My sword slash had been swung away with a strike from his sword that had moved at an untraceable speed. Just a second ago it was sticking in the ground, just what kind of trick is this!? My eyes widened in surprise.

In that little gap, I definitely felt the pressure coming from O'brien-san increase. His body, his whole presence, felt like it grew in size. I could only look as the aged knight raised his long sword. The next moment, my body moved faster than my mind could think and I somehow took on that attack with my sword. Blown away from the impact, I rolled away on the ground.

Unable to even understand how ragged my breathing had gotten, I just gazed at the sky while lying on the ground. I couldn't feel the sword in my hand anymore. My hand's gone completely numb. All the joints of my body, and my throat for breathing too much, hurt a lot.

"Let's end here for today. After dinner, come to the library."(ob)

"Ye–s."

As I answered that, Souichi came over and looked at me with a worried face.

"Are, are you alright?"

"Hm.....yeah..sorry about that."

"No, you don't have to..."

Souichi, being small and child faced, looked more like a girl. Maybe because his sister, Yayoi-chan, was more mature, those two looked like

twins. If I said that, he'd start sulking but, oh well. Somehow, I can't stop myself from teasing him. Also, the way he acts as well.....

For example, right now, as I apologised, he gave an embarrassed expression. It really messes with my mind. Having lost in front of him, I stood back up.

After I stood up, next the soldiers came to me one by one to appreciate my effort. For some reason, rather than towards Souichi and others who held insane powers, these soldiers seemed to have generated an affinity towards me who was beaten around by O'brien-san. How weird. Well, it's better than them being not fond of me, I guess. If they said something like me being so weak even though I was supposedly summoned to save the world, I'll probably won't recover from the damage.

As I walked while thinking of such things, I went and drank the warm water from the water jug kept near the field. At some point, Souichi had gone back and was swinging around his sword at the centre of the field. He didn't really have a form or a stance but due to his overpowered strength, the force waves from the sword alone seemed like they could cut things apart. How envious, seriously. Since I don't have the abilities like others have, I have no choice but to learn how to use a sword normally. Realizng that I was feeling jealous of a boy much younger than me, I shook my head. Taking another gulp of water. Really tasty. It felt so nice that I drank a bit too much and ended up spilling some water from my mouth and it wet my clothes a bit. But that felt nice as well. Due to the heat from my wounds and overworking my body, even this warm water felt nice and cold.

"Ah."

"Hm."

When I turned around at that voice, a girl with semi-long hair, pleated skirt and a white blouse with a blazer was standing there. It looks like the middle school uniform from our original world. At her side was another girl with black hair. She was Souichi's sister, Yayoi-chan. She was dressed in more medieval clothes like we have seen in movies and stuff. And the

girl in the uniform was Yayoi-chan and Souichi's childhood friend Fuyou-san.

Feeling her cold gaze, I scratched my cheeks.

"You're wounded so much again....."

"ugh.."

"Please leave the fighting to us Yamada-san. I really think it'd be better if you stayed here at the castle along with Toudou-san and Yui."(aya)

When she said that with a sigh, I ended up averting my eyes feeling pathetic. It's just as she said. Just like this girl, 10 years younger than me, said, I'm not suited to fighting. Let alone Souichi and others who got extremely combat related gifts from the goddess, I'm certain that I cannot win against even this magician girl. It was really pathetic, yet I had no retort.

I wonder what she thought of me, or maybe she lost interest.

"Well then, please excuse me."(aya)

Giving a bow, Fuyou-san walked away straight towards Souichi. In her stead, Yayoi-chan pointed her palm towards my left arm. Just as I felt warmth, my fatigue and pain began to disappear.

"This really is convenient. Magic and miracles. It really is a fantasy world eh?"(renji)

"fufu, you're saying the same things as Inoue-san."(yayoi)

While shaking my now recovered arm, Yayoi-chan laughed.

As expected, it's better when they're laughing like this. I don't really hate frank people like Fuyou-san but, I'm simply bad at dealing with them. Also, I've yet to see her smile even once. How should I say this, she's always acting so strong. I think, that girl lacks the composure right now as well.

"Please don't hate Aya-chan."(yayoi)

"Un?"

“Well, she’s really severe when talking with people she doesn’t know too well you see?”

“Ahh……well, I don’t really mind it.”

“That’s fine then.”

No, but well, yeah..

Fuyou-san herself was currently talking with Souichi and Hiyuu-san who was also training.

“Aya-chan’s worrying for you in her own way. So that everyone can return home safe and alive.”

“I know. Yayoi-chan, you’re really kind, aren’t you.”

“fufu, well then, if you’ll excuse me.”

Saying that, she walked away towards Souichi as well. The Brave sure is amazing. Even though I am so alone, he’s surrounded by 3 beauties. One of them is her sister though.

While gazing at the sky, I gave a sigh. I need a weapon. A weapon to kill gods. So that I don’t become a burden. Even if I’m unable to fully protect them, I at least want to fight alongside the kids.

Oh Goddess. You still have not fulfilled my wish.

As I looked at Souichi, surrounded by soldiers, a sad feeling lingered in my chest. Shaking my head, I gave a deep sigh, and let go of that thought with a wry smile.

———-I want to become a hero as well.

Just then, feeling a bit curious, I took out the medal given to me by the Goddess. A golden medal. Except for the embedded gems, there was nothing too peculiar about it. That goddess said that it was a weapon to kill gods. This simple looking medal. Am I supposed to buy some great weapon by selling this? I can’t understand it at all. Yesterday, even Utano-san told me that maybe it was a failure.

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(T/N: back to present)

“Puhahahaha—-th,this doesn’t suit you at all!”

“What are you laughing so hard at, you fly!”

“Who did you call a fly!?!”

[.....noisy.]

As I tried to comb down my hair with gel, the girl lying on my bed started laughing at me. Does this not suit me that much? Even though I was just cursing outside, in my heart, I grew worried. The number of things you could use to groom yourself in this world could be counted on your hands. I am somewhat aware of those, but in the end, it’s just half assed knowledge. Rather than this, it would have been easier to just have worn some fancy armour like when I met the King. At least, all I had to do then was just put it on.

The girl on my bed——a fairy with doll like features, Anastasia, was rolling while laughing not minding that her dress was getting crumpled as she did that. At times, a white cloth could be seen underneath that dress as she rolled around as well. That said, I’m not that big of pervert to lust after a doll like small creature. Paying it no heed, I restarted trying to fix my hair. Going by what I see on the mirror, it shouldn’t be that bad but being laughed at so much has made me uneasy. I guess that’s how human mind works.

As I put on the neat dress shirt and set the black necktie, I felt like a salaryman working in some corporate company. Remembering the old days, I felt a bit nostalgic but really, this doesn’t suit me. Not like Anastasia, but I gave a short laugh as well. That’s probably because after coming to this world, I have spent most of the time in travelling clothes.

“Ermenhilde, what do you think?”

[Well, it’s fine I guess? The problem is clothes. Do you have any

remaining?]

"From what I looked, yeah. Though, I'm not sure if they'll fit me anymore....."

Since my room was the same as a year ago, the clothes prepared for me and the arrangement of the furniture, all had been kept the same. Among those, there were many high class clothes made of quality fabric as well. But the problem was that they were prepared for me 3 years ago. I doubt that my height has changed much but due to the muscles I've gained, my body size has almost grown by 1 size. I wonder if I could still somehow fit in those clothes.

Somehow, I still remembered how to tie a necktie and surprising even myself, I was able to wear it properly. All said and done, I guess you don't forget things you've learnt even once.

"Eeh, how skilled."(ana)

"I've learnt it after all."(renji)

"How unusual."

[Well, Renji doesn't really care for appearances and stuff like that normally, after all.]

"Umu."

"Don't say that proudly. It's not cool."(ana)

Anastasia seemed to be the type that minded personal grooming as well but it was completely useless right now as all she did was laugh or sigh at me. What rude queen. Whenever I recall that she's the top of all fairies, I become really worried for the future of the fairy race.

Well, the rest of the fairies aren't really different from Anastasia and have having fun as their first priority.

"But still, what's up today? It really doesn't suit you at all though."(ana)

"I'm going for a dinner with Aya tonight."(renji)

[For that, I need to force the meaning of 'appearance and grooming' into

his head. You're being a nuisance so return already, you insect.]

"Who's an insect, you medal woman!? .....wait a sec."

What's with that surprised voice? When I looked towards the bed, the fairy who had been laughing like crazy till now stood up very docilely. It's probably not my imagination that her expression loks angry. Maybe due to her height, she glared at me while looking up at me. It's not scary at all though.

"Why did you not invite me!?"(ana)

"Why would I? Idiot. "

If I did, I can only imagine what Aya would say, or rather, what she'd do to me.

She didn't say it upfront but, I'm sure she's expecting to go to dinner alone, just the two of us. And if I were to go against her expectations———- my body is well aware what she'd do much to my own displeasure. No, even I won't be able to laugh it away like usual. Yeah, I can't be acting like a child always after all. I'm 28 already. My heart's still young but I'm at an age where I'm expected to read the mood properly.

But, Anastasia seemed like she really wanted to go to dinner with me as she was pouting right now. Is that supposed to be an objection from her? Leave me alone.

"So it's Aya this time....."(ana)

"What do you mean 'this time'?"(renji)

Please don't talk like I'm going after lots of girls. I looked at her with a fed up face as Anastasia bit her finger while making a serious face. Just what do you see me as? Or rather, what kind of character does everyone think I have? Just a while ago, even Kuuki called me out about my relationship with wome, it'll make me cry you know? Well, not really though.

But even that aside, even Utano-san seemed to be stricter than usual about the case with Solnea. How should I persuade her? The easiest way

would be to let them meet tomorrow and end it once and for all. I really want to be rid of all these false accusations. Well, I do believe that Solnea is a beauty but that doesn't mean I'll start lusting after her. That's not my personality. If I did, I'm sure one day, someone somewhere would end up getting hurt. Even the idiot me understands that. Not to mention I've still not resolved my feelings about Eru either, and then there's Utano-san and Aya as well.

Harems are great, I really think that. Only when I'm not the main related/concerned person to it.

"I've had enough! After defeating the Demon God you hid yourself, finally when we meet here at the capital you won't play with me much and you don't even invite me to dinner now. Aren't you being a bit too cold?"(ana)

"Well, it's tiring to spend time with you after all."(renji)

"You're being way too rude now."(ana)

[Seriously.]

"You're not faring any better than me, medal woman."(ana)

[No such thing. I'm Renji's partner after all.]

No wait, you. Even though you'd always get irritated when I called you my partner, why do say it so happily only at such times?

Am I the only one feeling very complicated right now? I'm glad yet can't actually feel happy about it. Ermenhilde didn't seem to understand my inner thoughts though. If I had a way to look at her expression, she must be making a triumphant expression right now.

"Stop fighting, both of you. You'll get scolded by Yui-chan."(renji)

[Muu.]

"ugh.."

I sighed seeing them both get quiet just by mentioning Yui-chan's name. It's amazing how they can't win against a child. They know that Yui-chan will get sad if they fight after all; these two really are honest at

heart. Well, I'm not any different though.

"It's unfair to use Yui's name, Renji."(ana)

[Yeah, that's right. It's not fair.]

"Why are you getting along now all of sudden?"(renji)

"We are not! Right, medal woman?"

[Exactly, you insect.]

Seriously, what the hell. While chatting with Anastasia who had already forgotten her earlier anger, I opened the wooden closet to choose some clothes. It seemed to be made of some fine quality wood as it seemed really sturdy yet was actually pretty light in weight. It took almost no effort to open the double doors. Taking out a few sets of clothes from it, I shut it back up.

Tonight we're heading towards Toudou's restaurant, a well-hidden yet really popular place. You'd think it'd be no problem seeing as one of the 13 heroes owns the place but due to its special location, it wasn't normally popular. After all, it's located in one of the back alleys with complicated structures.

On top of that, he didn't even try to advertise the place even once. Honestly, even Utano-san said that he didn't seem to be actually interested in doing it as actual business. By the way, I couldn't find the place by myself either and had to ask Utano-san to show me the location on a map of the capital. That's how well hidden it is.

"Sometime later, I'll take you out as well okay? So let me go for today."(renji)

"Really?"(ana)

"Probably. If I felt like it, someday."

"So basically you won't will you!?"

While racking my brains on deciding which clothes to choose, I lightly spoke that to Anastasia. Obviously, even my purse isn't thick enough to take anybody out for dinner even when I don't feel like it. While ignoring

Anastasia's voice of protest, I tried some of the shirts on me. Since it's been almost two years from when these were made, as you'd expect, they were tight. This is troublesome; I scratched my head while looking at the mirror. It'd be difficult to arrange for a new set of clothes before the night as well now. I guess the only way left is to go to a shop and get some readymade clothes. While checking if I had enough money, I planned for tonight.

Seemingly not happy from my response, Anastasia rose up from the bed. As she seemed to be using the power of wind spirits, her skirt fluttered around, making her thin, white yet nice thighs visible. Seriously, it's way too tempting to my eyes.

"I'll buy a grilled orc meat stick for you from some stall while returning, okay?"

"Just die!"

What violent is things this tiny is saying. Only her looks are cute, I'm sure she'd popular with men with weird fetishes. Like Koutarou, maybe Koutarou, oh and also Koutarou. He acts like a chunni but deep inside he's like that. While I was thinking of such things, my room's door was knocked on. And after a moment of gap, the door was opened and Yui-chan peeked inside. Behind her was the black armoured phantom knight, KNIGHT. Did they come looking for Anastasia?

"Oh, Yui."(ana)

"Excuse me, Renji-san."(yui)

"Yo, what's up yui-chan? If you were looking or Anastasia, take her back with you. She keeps on quarrelling with Ermenhilde, it's irritating."(renji)

"Wait, what are you saying so suddenly!?"(ana)

Anastasia raised a shout at the same time as KNIGHT closed the door behind him. Yui-cahn, with a sad expression, came closer to Anastasia floating near the bed.

How should I say this, though I am the one who incited this, even I'm feeling bad now a bit. Seeing Yui-chan like that, Anastasia lost her

confident expression that she has when talking to me and ermenhilde and was looking around nervously. At times she'd look at me, but I can't help her. Just give up.

And as KNIGHT walked behind Yui-chan like a shadow maintaining the exact same distance, it looked really surreal.

".....Ana?"(yui)

"It, it's not like that.....wasn't a fight. It wasn't a fight, right Renji? It wasn't, right!?"

Ignoring her pleas for help, I continued trying out other clothes. As expected all of them seem a bit small.....but not like I can't wear them at all. This one should work fine, I think?

Yui-chan silently reproached Anastasia and Anastasia constantly kept on asking for some help. KNIGHT kept silent as usual and simply stood behind Yui-chan indicating that he was clearly on Yui-chan's side. Ermenhilde and Anastasia alone made the room feel really lively already, but now it felt even more so as I gave a wry smile. I guess the proverb that it gets noisy whenever women gather isn't that wrong either.

"Say, Yui-chan look here for a sec, which one do you think suits me more?"(renji)

Collecting the clothes that I could wear, I asked Yui-chan for her opinion. Having been freed from Yui-chan's gaze, Anastasia also breathed a sigh in relief. Why is she so weak only to Yui-chan? Well, I guess anyone would feel guilty on being scolded by a child.

WHile listening to Yui-chan and Ermenhilde's opinion, I began to choose my clothes as Anastasia, probably out of boredom, flopped down back onto the bed. Since Yui-chan was here, she seemed to be paying mind to not ruin her dress this time.

"Say, Renji."(ana)

"What?"

"Is a date with Aya, fun?"

“Well, putting the fact whether can this be even called an actual date aside, yeah, it’s fun.”

“It is definitely a date. You’re going on dinner together right?”

“Before that, where the hell did you even learn what ‘date’ meant?”

“Just now, from Yui.”

I asked that solely to avert the topic but I was a bit surprised by the unexpected name that came from her. Yui-chan didn’t seem to mind it much either it seems. No well, she’s also 16 now I guess. It’s normal for her to be expected in such things. Should I be happy at her growth or should be worried about it? Anyway, I want to know if there is someone she likes.

When I looked towards Yui-chan, she wasn’t there anymore. When did she move? She was currently pushing down Anastasia down on the bed with a red face. Probably trying to shut her mouth but since Yui-chan isn’t exactly the physically fit type, it only looked like both of them had fallen onto each other on the bed. And on top of it, both of them wore skirts so it was pretty dangerous. Giving a cough, I averted my gaze towards the window instead but the silent pressure coming from KNIGHT and Ermenhilde was way too incredible. If it was weak hearted person, he would have gottena seizure.

Inside this, well not really a scene of ‘carnage’ (shuraba), I simply gazed out of the window.

“It’s good that everyone’s so lively, yup.”(renji)

[Where were you looking? What were you looking? Hm??]

OI, KNIGHT-san, please don’t stand beside me while realising such intense pressure will you? Also Ermenhilde, if I looked at Yui-chan and Anastasia in that way, I won’t forgive myself first and foremost, so be at ease. Stay calm.

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.

But still, I thought.

“Is something the matter, Renji-san?”(aya)

“No, it’s nothing.”

Wearing a tight deep blue dress and a thick shwal made of monster fur, Aya looked up towards me and talked. I should try not to get to worried of the fact that we were at a distance where our elbows basically touching each other. Normally Ermenhilde who couldn’t read the mood would speak something random just about now but currently she had been left with Utano-san for safekeeping so it was really quiet.

It was night time. As I walked along the main street, now having much less people than normal, I recalled the way to Toudou’s in my head.

“Aren’t you cold?”(renji)

“fufu, no, I’m fine.”(aya)

Saying that, Aya leaned slightly more closer towards me. While acting like I didn’t notice, I scratched my cheek with my other arm. She’s in a really good mood. If I said that out loud, I wonder what she’d say. I became a bit curious but decided against asking that and slowed my walking speed a bit.

Aya felt more taller today than usual, probably because of those high heel like shoes she’s wearing. Her untied hair swayed in the wind and shined in the faint light of the magic street lamps. Her light make up suited her much more as she was always a bit more mature than her peers.

While stealing glances of Aya’s happy face enjoying the coldness, I began to follow her swaying hair before I knew. 18 yrs old. Right between a girl and an adult woman, should I say. She’s really grown, or rather, has become really pretty. I wonder if this is how a dad seeing her daughter grow up feels like. I changed my mood while thinking of such stupid things.

“Maybe we should have hired a carriage or something.”(renji)

“Don’t worry about it. Also, do you even have that much surplus money on you?”(aya)

“Muu.”

“And anyway, isn’t it more fun to walk and talk like this?”

Being told that much, I had no way to refute it. I also think that it’s not bad to chat while walking like this. As we passed through various passerbys, we finally reached the landmark item shop I had been told. The alley turning inside from here is where Toudou’s restaurant is located. Aya also knew the place as she lightly pulled my sleeve to tell where we need to go.

It tickled a bit. I quickly hid my smile with my other hand as we entered the alley. It seemed pretty clean for a back alley and didn’t really feel dirty. But as expected, there were a lot less pedestrians. Expect for us, only a few more couples seemed to be walking here.

“As expected, there really are not many people here, eh?”(renji)

“True. The fact that even then Toudou-san’s restaurant became popular only shows how amazing he is at cooking.”

“yeah. That said, why did he open his restaurant in sucha place though?”

Considering its him we’re talking about, his reason would be something like, he just wants someone to enjoy his food. The number of customers is the lesser the better.

Toudou Hiiragi. One of our comrades, and a cook. A weirdo who asked for a cooking related skill even after coming to a fantasy world. A former NEET(shut-in), and sucks at social interactions. Can’t converse properly, and keeps his thoughts to himself. But still, he put in great effort to walk with us, and travel along with all of us.

As I recalled his appearance from an year ago, we finally saw our destination.

“Finally.....”

“Huh?”(aya)

“I looked for the place many times after coming to the capital but never found it.”

Also, there was the matter of my debt to Utano-san so I put more priority/effort at earning money rather than look for Toudou’s palce as well.

While thinking that, looked at the place. It’s outer appearance was basically a stone building on a wooden frame. It seems pretty well built. Even the parts that were supposedly damaged when he bought the place have been properly reinforced. When I tried touching, I felt something that didn’t exist in this world. Is this concrete?

When I looked at Aya, she gave a vague smile. It must be Kudou who prepared this. I don’t know how she prepared things like cement etc but her ability is [item creation]. She must have made it with that. Well, there was that one time where she made bombs out stones lying on the road during our journey so I’m not really surprised by anything she does. I can only say ‘oh, cool.’ That’s it.

The name of the restaurant was [Bird of Happiness]. Since the building itself felt more like a house, the board seemed oddly out of place.

“Seems like a nice place.”(renji)

“Yes. I have come here a few times before as well. It has a great atmosphere.”

“Sounds great.”

As I entered the place, the gazes of the people inside moved towards us. But their number wasn’t big at all. Going by a glance, only 10 customers and 2 employees seemed to be there. Probably one more employee should be in the kitchen. The entrance to the kitchen was in a blind spot so I couldn’t confirm it. Probably, Toudou’s there as well. The place had two floors and I could see the stairs leading to the upper floor. Since the restaurant itself doesn’t seem to be too busy, the second floor is probably Toudou’s living room.

With a greeting, the attendant led us to our seats. By the way, the employees were in maid outfits. They even had a frilled headband which really suited them. As expected, he's a man with taste as well.

Just when I was thinking of such things, Aya pinched the back of my hand. Her smile was more scarier than the pain, so I quickly walked to our given tables.

"Seeing as he has hired employees, I guess he's still making profit."(renji)

"That's true. He didn't do much advertising but the place got popular from word of mouth it seems."

Saying that, Aya handed over the menu card to me. That said, the number of dishes weren't that many.

Since this world didn't have the concept of home delivery, there was no easy way to procure ingredients so I guess, it can't be helped really. Since we're in the capital, it would be easier than being in some village but still, getting things cheap would be really difficult. But still, to have a full salad on the menu, does he have some connection with a farmer family? As for meat, Orc meat.....well that's not too difficult to get.

The rest were noodle/wheat-based type of dishes you'd never normally see in this world. Taking a glance at others, everyone seemed to be eating those as well.

"I guess dishes from our world are a rarity in this world, eh?"(renji)

"Pretty much. You can only eat such things here which is why this place got popular with connoisseurs. It's not gotten that popular though. Dishes we can get in the castle don't appear here either after all."

"Well obviously."

Well, it'd be great if it did though. As expected, it's not easy to make a dish from another world get popular that easily. After all, things like basic ingredients etc. all are different in this world. I recall him saying something like having difficulties finding substitutes for certain things. Also, the different peculiar ways to cook things is also an obstacle. I'm

not an expert but if I recall correctly, to make udon, you need wheat flour, water and salt, right?

While trying to recall the recipe that I'm pretty sure is wrong, I decided on the order. Of course, it's wheat based type. I order Tsukimi Udon and salad and Aya ordered Carbonara pasta. Hmm but well, I wonder if its weird to order something like Udon on a date but, I really want to eat that. I wonder if Toudou would make this himself?

"Is that much enough?"(renji)

"Yes. I don't eat that much anyway."

"If you're worried about my financial health, you don't have to okay?"

".....you sound like a father, Renji-san."

"Now, I'm not that old.....probably. At least keep me at 'brother'."

"fufu. But that's the kind of presence you have. Even Souichi sees you like that, you know."

But being a father is really.. The person who said such a troublesome thing was laughing while seeing my reaction. Even her usual cute gesture seemed more mature just because she had kept her hair loose.

Realizing my gaze, as if trying to hide her smile, she looked down to avert her gaze. Underneath the faint light of the magic lamps, I smiled seeing Aya cutely shrink herself like that to hide her embarrassment.

"Somehow, it really feels nostalgic."(renji)

"Eh?"

At my words, her face rose back up.

"Back when we had just come to this world, like, we didn't really talk much, did we?"(renji)

"We, well that's....."

"Back then, even during dinners like this, I only talked to Souichi and Yayoi-chan."

"uu.."

How should I say this, but the early Aya was shy, or rather, always built a wall between herself and others I think. I know she had complicated family circumstances, and have heard about it in detail. So I can understand why she was that way, and that's exactly why now I can talk to her like this about it.

Aya herself was blushing recalling her own past personality.

".....Renji-san has changed as well."(aya)

"Really?"

"Yes."

When she said that, I felt a bit sad in different ways. Averting my gaze to look outside the window, I gave a deep sigh.

"The me back then, what was I like?"(renji)

"Eh?"

"Aya, how did––"

At that, I stopped my own words. How should I ask her? I couldn't think of a way. It's way to embarrassing to ask how she came to like me. And before that, how can I act that presumptuous? If I was a woman, I'd never want to even want to hang around with such an old man.

That said, I couldn't come up with better words. Still stuck, Aya waited for me to continue.

"––-back then, from when we were travelling, have I changed?"

In the end, I went with a safe question. While sighing at myself, I turned my gaze back to Aya. Her clear eyes were looking directly at me. As our gazes connected, I felt like I'd get overpowered by her strong eyes.

"Yes."(aya)

Still looking at me with those strong eyes, she nodded.

"The Renji-san back then was, much more cooler."(aya)

"Cool, is it?"

What a vague word. I can't tell how I have changed from back then but it seems I am not as cool as I was before. Well, I can't deny it either. I'm still stuck with my past. But——

"I see."(renji)

"fufu."

This girl's eyes, the woman who always supported me, the comrades who thought of me as a leader,——I don't want to betray them. I want to protect them. The movement among the demons, Solnea's existence, the absence of the Demon God. Through these various signals, I'm sure the world is going to start moving again. At that time, I'll have to fight alongside Ermenhilde once again. No matter how much I hate fighting, I can't run away from it.

At that time, just like that time——just like how I sacrificed Eru to kill the Demon God, to never lose anyone ever again. I need to resolve myself to step forward once again.

"Well, it seems I'm not cool at all right now."(renji)

"Not really. Even now, Renji-san is still pretty cool though?"(aya)

"Be honest, you don't have to force yourself to say it, you know? Look, your face is all red."

"……mouu, you're supposed to ignore such things!"

While seeing Aya pout, I laughed. Even though she's dressed so maturely, her expressions are still childish. I guess her true appearance is that of one with childish expressions maybe. As I thought of that, she looked at me with a full wide smile.

As we kept on talking like that, our order came and was arranged on the table. The steaming Udon stimulated my hunger further. Aya's carbonara looks delicious as well.

"I'll work hard as well."(renji)

"Huh?"

"Nothing. Let's eat."

I slurped my Udon. Aya seemed to be wanting for me to say it again but, yeah whatever, this Udon is really delicious. As expected of Toudou, he has the greatest job ever. While thinking of things like a gourmet reporter, I gave a quick glance towards Aya.

Did she give up seeing that I'm not going to repeat it again, right now she was focused at the carbonara pasta she had ordered. Seeing her small gestures like holding her hair back slightly, I felt captivated. While looking at her, I thought.

———I couldn't become a hero.

Then at least, I could move forward with confidence. Just like before. Like an year ago.

"The tournament……"(renji)

"Yes?"

"No, well, I was thinking maybe I could try a bit harder in the fighting tournament as well."

I doubt just trying alone would let me win but still, I might change a bit.

That alone would have enough meaning for me.

I'm not some Hero.

But even I, once admired those Heroes.

Chapter 43: Fighting Tournament (2)

Noon, a few days after I had my dinner date with Aya. While chewing on the skewered Orc meat, I walked through the main street when Mururu, who was also eating the same, suddenly stopped. Wondering what happened, I also stopped only to see her ogling another food stand. Her tail shaking energetically underneath the cloak was cute but considering this had happened so many times already, I sighed.

“You’re still eating right now. At least wait till you’ve finished that.”(renji)

“…….please?”(mururu)

“No means no.”

When I clearly declared that, she started walking again with her animal ears drooping sadly. It’s a bit irritating that I am the one who feels so guilty when she does that but, I must harden my heart this time.

And Feirona was walking behind us while enjoying the scene with a smile. When I shot a glare at him, his smile only deepened. And at this expression from him, the women passing by us all seemed to be smitten instantly…..I think. Well, handsome people look attractive no matter what expression they make.

Beside Feirona, another beauty was walking, Solnea. Seeing her walking in the falce where usually Ms Francesca would be felt a bit fresh. She had, rare to this world, long silky black hair, pale white skin and somewhat lifeless ruby red eyes. She was wearing a black cloak similar to mine which was hung down from her shoulders. The thin cloth dress she wore emphasized her sensual body lines, especially her thin waist where a belt had been tightened.

Normally, seeing the handsome guy walk along with the magician girl felt really picturesque but seeing this shadowy beauty with him looks amazing as well. I feel like I’m the only one in this party that doesn’t really have exceptional looks. I started feeling depressed just thinking about it.

[What happened, Renji?]

“Nothin—-”

“I’m done eating!”(mururu)

“——that’s way too fast. Chew properly at least.”

“It’s fine.”

[.....Do you even know the meaning of that?]

I’m pretty sure, she doesn’t. While I was pondering over my status in this party, Murur had finished her meat and looked up at me pleadingly. She really looked like a puppy waiting to get fed. She’s a wolf though..... She must want more food I guess. Her gaze seemed to switch from me then to the stall after all.

“Have you forgotten what we’re going to do next?”(renji)

“No problem. I can’t move on empty stomach.”(mururu)

“It’ll be fine if you didn’t move much as well, to be honest. Fine, this is the last time, okay?”

Like handing change to a child, I gave her a copper coin. Taking the coin, she literally skipped over to the stall at an incredible speed.

From hereon, the qualifiers for the fighting tournament will begin and Ms Francesca will be taking part in it. We decided yesterday to go and cheer her on. She seemed to be all fired up to take part but, let’s see how she fares in the battle. It’s very probable that she would fall in these preliminary rounds. So, this might be our only chance to cheer her like this, we decided to go today. I got scolded by Ermenhilde when I said that out loud though. Her quiet, calm voice of anger is pretty damn scary than a normal raging anger. Well, it’s not like I was serious when I said that. I don’t know what level students of magic academy are at but I do know the level of the adventurers and mercenaries that take part in it. I have taken part in this before as well, after all. The chance of her actually getting to take part in the battle is pretty low. She might get one chance through family connections though.

Feirona and Mururu didn't seem to know about the tournament at all so I invited them since they seemed interested. Solnea didn't really have any other place to go so I took her with me as well. As you'd expect, she had no interest in the tournament either.

"Are those really that tasty?"(sol)

While we were waiting for Mururu, Solnea came beside me and asked that. Her gaze was at Mururu——or rather, at the stall.

Mururu was currently getting a hot dog replica with bread, veggies and orc meat. Why doesn't she get fat even though she eats so much meat. Well, I guess she does move a lot with all the monster hunting we do.

"Yeah, it's pretty delicious. Want some too?"(renji)

"…….I can?"

"I don't mind. Getting one more won't hurt now."

Saying that, I handed a copper coin to Solnea as well. By the way, the gold I had given her before had disappeared in buying clothes. Apparently, Ms Francesca didn't make any compromises in getting clothes for Solnea. In fact, I was told that one gold coin wasn't enough so she spent her own money for Solnea as well. As expected of a lady from a noble house I guess. Well, it's her own hard earned money, it doesn't matter how she decides to spend it. But it should be noted that both Feirona and Mururu were really tired by the end of it.

Taking the copper coin, she also headed towards the same stall as Mururu. As I saw her off, Feirona came beside me.

"Being a babysitter sure looks tough."(elf)

[Seriously.]

"Why are you saying that?"(renji)

You did literally nothing. Only Feirona heard that Ermenhilde's voice other than me. I still don't trust Solnea enough and Mururu seems like she'd overreact everytime she hears Ermenhilde's voice. I can trust Feirona to act normally at all times. At Ermenhilde's voice, Feirona

shrugged his shoulders and continued talking.

"So, got any idea of who or what she is?"(elf)

"None at all. I let her meet Utano-san as well but there was no abnormality she said ."(renji)

"If the Sage herself says so, it might be true."

[Though I wonder if you can actually say that there are no abnormalities in a person who was literally living inside a crystal.]

Seriously. Last night, I took some time and introduced Solnea to Utano-san but didn't agin much info. She is a normal human, apparently. Even the crystal recovered from that cave was no different than normal crystal sold in cheap shops.

Well, it might be stupid to ponder over something you know nothing about I guess. With a sigh, I decided to cut that train of thoughts. I might start getting over suspicious towards Solnea and have a bad effect on her instead. I don't like such things. I should end it all within my thoughts. I'll deal with whatever happens, when it actually happens.

"For the time being, the only thing we know is that she doesn't have any magical energy inside her."

"fumu."

When I said that, Feirona went into thinking while resting his chin on her fingers. His every action makes him look good, really.

[So she's basically the same as Renji, eh?]

"Pretty much. Well, I have you so I don't really have much trouble though."(renji)

[.....hmm.]

In my case, I just don't have magical energy because I am not from this world in the first place. But.....What about Solnea? But there's no need to worry about that now. Certainly, people with no magical energy are rare but it's not like they are non-existent. Special people like that do get born every once in a while. And it's not like they get discriminated against

either. You can use convenient things like magic if you have magical energy but it's not like everything requires it. As long as you can get education, you get a well paying job as well. Just like in our world. There are countless things a human can do without magical energy.

What is concerning is that the crystal she was sleeping in did have magical energy. And there was no answer to that question either. It was difficult to discern who she was with the info at hand. All I can do is take care of her as just a person I found in trouble. While I was thinking of that, Mururu and Solnea came back walking alongside each other while eating their hotdog replicas. It was not very well mannered to do that so I could only sigh and give a wry smile. Black and white. Their colours were the opposite but they totally looked like sisters.

"It's bad manners., seriously."(renji)

"But it's tasty."(mururu)

"Well, great. I spent money on those so please relish them properly while eating at least."

"I know."

"I hope so."

She remained expressionless as usual but her stuffed face looked really cute. The ketchup sticking on her mouth only added to her charm.

And just like the white girl, the black girl was also expressionlessly eating the hotdog. Since she was eating it nicely while taking small bites everytime, she looked more sweet than Mururu.

"Is it tasty?"(renji)

"Yes."(sol)

When I asked that, she gave a short, concise reply. It's really like her to do that.

"It's good that you're enjoying but let's hurry now. We'll miss Francesca's turn otherwise."(elf)

"Oh right, I almost forgot."(renji)

“gulp let’s hurry then, Renji.”(mururu)

“……..you’re the reason we’re late, you know?”(renji)

As Feirona began to walk, we followed him as well. Walking between Mururu and Solnea felt like I had a flower in both hands but unfortunately, both of them were more concentrated on their food rather than me. Stomach before everything, I guess. It’s pretty sad in my position to be honest.

“Renji.”(mururu)

“Hm?”

“Can Fran clear the prelims?”

Whit a ketchup stained mouth, she asked me that.

If Fran—-Ms Francesca would be able to clear through the prelims.

“Well, who knows.”(renji)

When I shrugged my shoulders, she frowned at me in a somewhat angry manner. Did she want to me to at least say that she’d pass, even if it was just words?

But, I can’t help that. I don’t even know who her opponent is, and neither do I know the skill level of the participants this year.

Though Ms Francesca has gotten used to fighting with monsters with her journeys, she’s still a bit naïve. I feel like that part of her personality will appear all the more so since this time she’s facing living humans rather than monsters. Monsters and humans are fundamentally different. I’m worried whether she’d be able to fire her magic against humans. Even Aya and Koutarou still hesitate in doing that. Utano-san doesn’t hesitate but she does get depressed later on. Even I remember how bad I felt after the first time I cut down a man. Hurting others puts a lot of burden on you mentally. Can Ms Francesca handle that burden?

If she can…….she actually might pass the prelims.

“Well, the odds might turn in her favour today. We can’t say who’ll win for sure till we see the battle itself.”(renji)

“I see.”(mururu)

[How realistic. Wouldn’t it be fine if you tried to be a bit more optimistic for her?”]

That’s not what my character is like, and you know that. I simply shrugged my shoulders in answer to Ermenhilde.

Mururu’s tail seemed to be drooping down and was sulking due to not getting the answer she was hoping for. Even though she was the one who asked the question in the first place.

It’s easy to say that someone will win. But, it’s Ms Francesca who actually has to work hard. It’s not something I can say so easily like that.

While seeing her cute sulking face, I finally saw the huge building appear in front of us. And the main street felt like it became populated and energetic as we got closer as well.

The Colosseum. The cylindrical building was tall enough that you had to raise your head to see the top and it was currently filled with people. Everyone has gathered here to see the fighting tournament. There are already more than hundred people here already. And the tournament hasn’t even begun yet. The crowd will only get bigger and bigger.

Normally, the arena is a place where moneyless adventurers, mercenaries and young men proud of their skill put their lives on the line to fight here to earn money. They fight against humans, demi-humans, beastmen and even captured monsters here. The monsters only include low level ones like goblins, kobolds and Orcs though. And only, in one vs one battles. Though one vs many battles are very popular with the spectators. In this world that lacks ways of amusement, such dangerous things were the only way for them to feel excited. If you win, the reward is great, if you lose, you’d be badly injured. You might even die. That’s the kind of place we were heading to. Well, what I gave was an extreme example though.

Normally, there are very rarely any people who fight till their deaths. Against humans, as long as you say ‘I surrender!’ the battle is over. And even if one doesn’t do that, the referee would often declare the victor and

it'll settle the match before there's a need to fight till death. Those who are ready to actually put their lives on the line and fight against monsters are a very small group of people who are very desperate.

"So what do you think about this, Feirona?"(renji)

"I hope she wins, really. Francesca has been really working hard for this."(elf)

I see. Am I the only one being too harsh?

While thinking of that, we joined the line of people as well. I could get a free pass for myself but I'll feel bad to let these guys wait in the line alone. As I looked around, I saw a lots of people just looking at those waiting to get an entrance to the arena. There were also a lot many stalls here than the main street as well.

"It's painful to not have you hardwork pay off."

"……Yeah."

I felt a certain gentleness from Feirona's words. Did that come from personal experience? Or has he actually developed a sense of bond with Ms Francesca while travelling with her. In either case, this elf man seemed to be wishing for Ms Francesca's victory. And Mururu as well. These guys sure have started to get along with each other. Seeing their warm bonds, I gave a smile. Being aware of that, I hid my mouth with my right hand but the sharp sighted Elf just averted his gaze acting like he didn't see it. I wonder if he's happy or just embarrassed.

"Oh right, will you guys not enter?"(renji)

Remembering suddenly, I asked that. I know that both Feirona and Mururu were much more skilled than normal adventurers. They might not win the whole thing but they'll probably go pretty far in the tournament.

But, while realizing my thoughts, Feirona shook his head. Mururu just continued eating her hotdog. This girl really prioritizes food over everything, doesn't she.

“I don’t like standing out.”(elf)

“Aah, I completely get what you mean.”(renji)

[.....And why are you guys okay with that?]

Ermenhilde gave an exasperated sigh towards both of us. I am one thing but its rare for Feirona to get the same reaction as me from Ermenhilde.

“Renji won’t be appearing?”(sol)

“Hm?”

The voice came from someone unexpected.

Solnea, who was eating just like Mururu, asked me that. I wasn’t surprised, but it was a bit rare. I thought she didn’t show any interest in such things. Well, then don’t take her to a place like an arena. I feel like someone will tell me that. Whatever. I can’t just lose sight of an amnesiac girl either, can i?

“It’s already been decided that I’ll be taking part. In the main matches on the second day though.”(renji)

The tournament was divided into two days. On the first day is team battles. And on the second day, it’s one vs one tournament with the qualifiers from today’s preliminaries and us summoned heroes included. At least, the weapons we have to use aren’t holy swords or magci/demonic swords but rather, training swords with dull edges. Aya should have been limited in some way as well.

Just like Utano-san wanted, it’d be great if we could pull a lot of crowd to watch the show.

“I see.”(sol)

“What, are you interested in things like this?”(renji)

“Meaning?”(sol)

“The tournament, the arena, fighting in general. Are you interested in such things?”

Saying that, I looked towards the entrance of the arena. Solnea also

followed my gaze and look towards it. But, she remained silent. Getting no reply, after some time I looked back at Solnea only to see her staring at me. I still couldn't feel any wave of emotion from her. Her gaze still like in a daze. Actually, being constantly stared at like from so close that increased my heartbeat slightly.

"No, not really."(sol)

"I..see....."(renji)

Feeling a bit embarrassed from her straight gaze, I lost my words for a second. At that, Mururu who had been eating till now looked up towards me.

"Your face is red."(Mururu)

"Just your imagination."(renji)

"Kukuku, it's a hot day for the end of the year eh?"(elf)

[.....Tch.]

You guys really do get along well. Is it that much fun to tease me? Goddamn it. Scratching my cheek that felt like it was gonna cramp, I averted my gaze. At that, Solnea simply looked at us in confusion. I guess she simply became slightly curious about the fights which is why she asked that. There was no other reason behind it probably. I simply overreacted seeing her say something like that, that's all. And to her gaze as well.

For some reason, I'm not good at being looked at so directly. Is it because I lack confidence? Because I feel like they'd see through what kind of person Yamada Renji is?

"But, Renji, I'm interested in seeing you fight."(sol)

"I see, I see. Well, I'll try to work hard in my fight so be sure to enjoy it."(renji)

That said, my opponent is Souichi. Trying hard alone won't let me win but I don't intend to give up before even starting. For starters, I'm gonna give it a shot at least.

[How unusual. I thought you'd be totally reluctant to do such things?]

I wonder what she thought of me as Ermenhilde spoke in a somewhat surprised voice. Normally, at such moments, I'll usually say something pathetic and the Ermenhilde would scold me for it. That's how it had been.

Even I think that. I don't like standing out, and it's not like I'll use Ermenhilde in the tournament either. In a situation where the benefits from cheats to me are almost minimal, my strength is only slightly more than normal adventurers. Even if I fought Souichi while using training swords, there's a very low chance for me to win. Just like Ermenhilde said, I'll probably put in a little effort and then quickly lose and get it done with. At least, I wouldn't say something like I'll work hard.

[I see, I see. Good.]

What followed, was a truly happy voice from Ermenhilde. Normally when I hear that, I'd say something random at her and tease her but somehow, for some reason, I couldn't say anything. Because I knew what Ermenhilde was thinking very easily. She's simply genuinely happy that I decided to work hard. She has been telling that to me for so long after all. Seeing her so happy like that, I didn't feel like saying anything else at all. In a different sense from Solnea's gaze, I covered my mouth.

But this time, nobody seemed to have noticed my reaction. I looked at the crowd gathered in front of the arena with a daze. And Solnea looked at me continuously.

"What is it?"(renji)

"You're an interesting person."(sol)

Saying just that, she returned back to eating her hotdog replica. Unable to realize what she truly meant by that, I could only tilt my head in confusion.

[As usual, she's a weird girl]

Seriously.

.

.

By the time, Mururu and Solnea finished eating their hotdogs and we had entered the arena, almost half of the spectator seats had already been filled. Sitting on the stone seats, Mururu and Solnea sat to my left and right. Feirona sat done on the other side of Solnea.

As I held on to the skewered orc meat in my hand, I recalled watching baseball matches like this back in my original world. Just then, Mururu, who was also eating the same thing moved her sights. On following her gaze, I saw Ms Francesca wearing her blue school uniform. She was currently standing at the entrance to the main stage. It must be her turn next.

“Fran, she’s there.”(mururu)

“So it seems. Aah, she really seems nervous.”(renji)

I could tell even from this far away that she was extremely nervous. She seems to have a sword as a weapon as she held it, while inside the scabbard, tight to her chest. Moving my gaze, I looked at the two who were currently fighting in the arena right now. Maybe because the number of applicants was great, the selection process was being done through survival battle method. Around 10 or less participants will fight at the same time and only the last man standing would go to the next round. Except for the 2 fighting, there 5 other participants currently lying on the ground groaning in pain. At least they’re not dead.

The skill level of the two currently fighting was.....not really high. No, maybe I’ve simply gotten a bit used to seeing higher level battles due to watching the training fight between Masaki-chan and Souichi. Compared to the adventurers of this world, these guys seem to have average skill. One of them was using a large sword, as tall his own height, and the other was using short swords skilfully in his both hands.

But seemingly uninterested in their fight, Mururu continued to be focused more on the meat in her hands. Is that fine with you?

“Don’t overeat. We’ll go for lunch with everyone later as well, you know?”(renji)

“No problem. I can eat that as well.”(mururu)

“.....You’ll get fat.”

When I said that, she began to touch around her chest as if checking something.

[Maybe we should let her get fat for once?]

“That’d be troublesome on its own though.”(elf)

It was Feirona who answered to Ermenhilde’s suggestion. Certainly, for Mururu, who was the vital point of the vanguard of the party, to get fat would indeed be troublesome. Though I’m not sure if he was just joking or was actually serious. I gave laugh hearing him.

Not paying any attention to our conversation, Mururu continued patting her chest. I have heard that a girl’s chest grows bigger on massaging but that’s just a superstition. Utano-san had clearly verified that. I don’t know what she’d do to me if she heard that though. Solnea on the other side just was in some kind of daze, wondering about god knows what. As usual I guess.

The main arena was cylindrical in shape and surrounded by a stone wall. That stone wall had countless scratches and cuts marked on it. The ground had many parts still blasted out and there were even some broken weapons lying here and there. All of this was an indication of the intenseness of the [show] that takes place here.

It was at least 200m in diameter, I think. Pretty big, in my opinion. It closely resembles the colloseum we see in movies. At the very top of the spectator stands was place covered in high quality cloth. It was the place from where the royalty would sit and watch the arena. Right now, we were currently directly opposite to that area. The other spectators were excitedly shouting and enjoying the fights in the arena right now.

The fighting tournament was the main event that takes place at the end of the year. The winner gets a reward of 5 silver coins, and other than

that, if one gets acknowledged they might even get appointed as a Knight or a court magician as well. Not just that, it was also the best place to test your own strength. In this world that lack ways of amusement, there were many people who'd work hard all the year round just to take part in this tournament. In a way, it was considered an honor to just get to take part in this tournament.

"Will I also grow as much as Fran one day?"(mururu)

"It'd be great, if you do."(renji)

"Yeah."

I decided not to ask 'growth' of what exactly. That's my way of being kind. Unlike Ms Francesca, imagining a flat grassland, I said that. Soon, Mururu returned back to eating her meat. By the looks of it though, the one thing you'd grow right now is your stomach rather than chest. Well, considering the her body movement as a beastwoman, she probably won't gain much fat. In fact, I feel like I've never seen a fat beastman.

In the meantime, the battle in the arena seemed to be reaching its climax. The adventurer using two swords began to fight in a more aggressive state suddenly as the crowd went wild with cheers. As if being powered up by those cheers, he dealt out a combo of attacks with actual skill and not just random movements. But the man with huge sword was blocking that combo very well.

"Who will win?"(sol)

"Hm?"

That question came from Solnea sitting beside me, still looking straight at the arena.

"Probably the one using the large sword."(elf)

It was Feirona who answered. I also nodded at his unhesitating answer. The dual sword wielder had the momentum but the large sword user had more stability and solidness. He's defending against the flurry of attacks with ease. Anyone with even slight experience could tell that it's only a matter of time before the dual wielder runs out of stamina.

And as expected, the momentum of his attacks soon began to fall. But still, the large sword user didn't take action. He must be aiming for the momentum when his opponent is completely out of stamina..... I guess he's the type that lays importance on dealing attacks with max certainty. His way of thinking wasn't wrong either as the moment the dual wielder stopped his attack, the large sword user blew him away along with his 2 swords in a single swing. As large roars of cheer rose, the man gave a bow an went back to through the gate having earned his pass to the next round. Seems like an unsocial, or rather, boorish guy. Very manly indeed. Even his weapon is large sword.

"Looks like Feirona was correct."

"Anyone could tell that. Didn't you predict that as well, Renji?"

"Well, you can't tell the result till the battle's finished after all."

"fumu, you're not wrong, I guess."

[The next one's starting.]

At the same time, cheers rose again.

The fainted participants had been carried away by the staff personnel. At the same time, the next batch——Ms Francesca and others appeared.

"It's starting."(renji)

" n, I know."(mururu)

Quickly finishing the food, Mururu's gaze turned towards the arena. 7 participants. But only one will be the winner. The names of the participants began to be announced and the first one was Ms Francesca. The announcement echoed in the minds of the spectators directly through magic. I'm pretty used to it thanks to Ermenhilde but it still feels a bit weird to hear someone else's voice directly inside your head.

Except Ms Francesca, everyone else seemed to be adventurers from either the capital or the Tactics City, making everyone close combat type fighters. A magician like Ms Francesca actually might win it if she could position herself well and avoid direct battles.

“Can she win?”(sol)

“We’ll know soon enough.”(renji)

As I answered that, the participants started to spread over the arena. Maybe too nervous, Ms francesca was taking deep breaths. Adventurers used to fighting won’t overlook her like that. A troublesome magician, and since she’s nervous, she’d be the first one to get targeted. It’s easy to understand how their mind works even without being actually there on the battlefield.

Mururu seemed to be equally nervous but she kept looking at Ms Francesca without even blinking.

[So it begins.]

“Yeah.”

And the sound to begin the fight echoed. Even without the use of magic, it felt like the sound echoed all over the arena.

At the same time, all the participants began to take action. You’d think they’d go for the closest opponent but two of them went for Ms Francesca. At first, a baldy sword user and a dwarf axe-user attacked her from the front. She probably didn’t expect that to happen as her reaction seemed to be one step too late. It wasn’t normal for two contestants to team up like this, especially when they haven’t even met beforehand.

But Ms Francesca had also gained a lot of experience since the first time we met. She was only surprised for a second, the very next instant she lightly kicked the ground and the baldy suddenly fell to the ground face front. It was a pitfall trap, a skill we were already used to seeing. She had created a small hole that wouldn’t be noticed easily. Only big enough for someone to get his foot stuck in it and trip over. Since that man was holding his sword with both hands, he was unable to even recover from the fall quickly. Seeing the one beside him fall like that, the dwarf’s movement also stopped for a second. The next instant, the dwarf was blown away by a invisible magic ball—-an air ball. Next she hit the baldy, who was groaning in pain from hitting the ground with his face, with her short sword, while still in the sheath, into his stomach. Since there was

no danger of cutting him, she hit him with all her strength and the man fainted. The dwarf, know to be one tough race, unsteadily stood up but another contestant used that chance to hit him in the head and knock him out. Ms Francesca wasn't the only opponent, showing an opening like that would result in loss.

Now only 4 remained. While Ms Francesca was dealing with those two, another one had been taken out. One magician, 2 swordsmen, and one using his barehands. Probably a martial arts user or a dark vessel user. Ms Francesca had the advantage in reach of attacks but I doubt the other 3 would give her such an opening. The deadlock remained for a few ten seconds. The first one to move was one of the swordsmen. Using daggers in both hands, he faced the barehanded warrior. He swung a slash towards the enemy's flank but that man dodged it with minimal movement and struck the sword user's torso with his fist. Even though he was wearing leather armour, it seems like the attack was too strong as he dropped his daggers and fell to the ground.

"Only 3 remain."

"Right."

I nodded to Mururu's words. The fight's going in the right direction, I think. At first, when those two attacked together, I thought it'd be over but she did well to beat them. The announcement had introduced her as a student, but due to that first battle, others are now wary of her. In terms of fighting experience, Ms Francesca is nowhere near the other two. But the fact that she's still maintaining the pressure, not allowing the other 2 to team up against her, is because the first ambush on her failed. Also, they have yet to see the pitfall as well. This is a great advantage to her. Basic magic includes fire or air balls or rock and ice arrows. The pitfall magic isn't really included in the common sense of magic in the people of this world. At the most, the only info around would be that the Grand Magus and one of the heroes, Aya sues such a magic. Even after an year, I doubt many magicians have started using such a magic. At least I have not heard of any such magician. Then, that pitfall might become her trump card.

The enxt one to move was Ms Francesca and the other swordsman. The man using longsword and leather shield faced the barehanded man. Ms Francesca used a chant-less ice ball and fired it at the bare handed man further helping the sword user. But maybe because he had incredible kinetic vision, or simply had too much experience, he easily dodged the sword swing and the fist sized ice ball. And after that, countered the sword user in the same way as before but ended up being the one falling down. He didn't fall flat on his face like the earlier one but this opening wouldn't be missed by the sword user. Since he was too close, he couldn't swing his sword so instead he used his shield to hit him straight and made him faint.

Now it was 1 vs 1. Without any gap, the sworduser ran towards Ms Francesca. It showed that he was experienced in fighting against magicians. Magicians use long range, heavy firepower spells to take down their enemies, or so is the common image of magicians in this world. The best way to not let them concentrate and use spells is to rush them and enter close combat. Magic could only be activated by concentrating and heightening your powers of imagination. Reversely speaking, you could completely seal a magician if you don't let them concentrate. It is a known fact.

A normal magician would here try to create space between them but Ms Francesca drew her short sword from the sheath. A light magical energy covered her limbs. Enhancement of physical abilities. I was a bit surprised seeing her use this as a trump card since I had never seen her use this magic before.

"That's the way."(elf)

I heard Feirona speak that. It was Feirona who taught Ms Francesca how to use a sword. The short sword and longsword clashed, and though slightly awkwardly, she handled the attacks. At the same time, she seemed to be even aware of not tripping over the fallen down other participants. The way of using the sword, the way of moving in a battlefield. She remembers to concentrate even while moving well. She has been taught really well it seems.

And, Ms francesca also had magic to help her. Did she start getting used to the opponents attacks, or did her opponent start panicking and making crude movements, he was barely able to fend off her attacks. She slowly became even able to completely fend of his longsword's attack without much trouble.

"Compared to a lizardman, his movements are too slow."

"Well, obviously."

I agreed with Mururu who compared him with a monster. Monsters have much more physical strength and stamina than humans. It's not even worth comparing.

Certainly, if she could face a more powerful humanoid monster, it made her skills easier to understand. Magician and swordsman. A rear guard job and the vanguard job. But even so, they were fighting on equal terms. Before I knew it, that newbie adventurer girl had already grown into such a competent adventurer.

After a few more exchange of attacks, the opponent began showing signs of exhaustion. On the other hand, Ms Francesca didn't show any signs either conceit or pride. There was not even a sway in the magical energy enveloping her showing that she still had plenty of magical energy left. Finally, seeing her opponent make a big swing again, she used the gap to create a hole beneath him and buried his foot till the ankle. His attack met only the ground and his open side of his face was hit by her short sword. That's gonna really hurt, yeah. The man rolled over the ground and twitched while laying there. Only his face had been hit but the impact of his body hitting the ground must have been hard as well. The blood coming from his nose shows how painful it must have been.

"fuu."

"waah."

It seemed even I had become nervous as I breathed out finally and heard the same kind of sigh of relief from beside me as well. Looking there, my gaze connected with Mururu's. And at the same time, the voice directly coming to our heads declared the winner as Ms Francesca.

“She won.”(mururu)

“Yeah. Looks like we’ll need to celebrate.”

“Yeah.”

I smiled back seeing Mururu giving a rare wide smile as well. I felt my chest become warm seeing her expression.

Feirona didn’t show much change in her expression but I know he’s pretty happy as well. I wonder if he himself knows that the corners of his mouth are turned up much more than usual? Realizing my gaze, the handsome elf hid his mouth in a very casual manner. Since I’m always teased by him, I’ll definitely tease him later to my heart’s content. Definitely.

“She became victorious.”(sol)

But, only Solnea, like usual spoke that in a flat voice. I looked towards Ms Francesca once again. I’m guessing she is the most surprised with the result of her match. Even though she has been declared as a victor, she’s still staring at the short sword in her hand with surprise.

I wonder what kind of emotions are going through her right now, what is she feeling right now?

I became a bit curious so I decided to ask her later during the celebration. Till the official asked her to leave the arena, she remained standing there in surprise.

Chapter 44: Fighting Tournament (3)

I wonder if I am the only one feels good to see food slowly decrease from the numerous dishes arranged on the table. l looked at Mururu eating the Udon with a fork having left the difficult to use chopsticks aside. After a while, Mururu, who had been focused at her food only, realized my gaze and looked at me.

“……..What?”(mururu)

“Nothing, I was just thinking that you really can eat a lot.”(renji)

“It’s tasty.”

“Well, I’m glad. It was made by my friend so hearing that makes me happy as well.”

“I see.”

She gave a wide smile at that confusing me a bit. But, it’d be weird to think of such things and not eat, so I also moved my chopsticks towards my dish. My order had been Soba. Solnea had ordered the same dish as well, and was currently trying her best to use the chopsticks and eat it. If it’s that difficult, you could just use a fork like Mururu, you know? Well, I did actually tell her to use a fork but for some reason she seemed adamant to use the chopsticks only. I don’t why she became so obsessed with that but if she herself wants it that way, I think it’s fine. It’s a bit frustrating to watch though. The noodles will start to stretch so I hope she doesn’t take too long.

Ms Francesca and Feirona didn’t seem to be much of the adventurous type in trying food as they still ordered a spaghetti type dish already common in this world. They were both, of course, using forks and eating as gracefully as possible. Seriously, these two look good no matter what they’re doing. Solnea was…….well, seeing a beauty have trouble with eating food might have its own charm for being a bit surprising I guess?

Other than that, there were also deep fried and vegetable based dishes on the table as well. The first of them was, Sashimi? Fish type dishes

were rare in this world, probably not more than river fishes being fried and eaten is all I can think of. The sea was the territory of monsters, so jobs like fishermen didn't even exist. Even in the Commercial Sciences City which is located at a coast, saltwater fishes are very rarely sold. They're not non-existent but the number and variety was simply too low. Thus, dishes based on fishes were sparse. In fact, there might be people inland that aren't even aware that even seas and the ocean have fishes of their own. And, to such people, a dish where you have to eat a fish basically raw is probably not their idea of 'fresh'. And true, only I, who ordered it, was eating the dish.

"But still, who would have thought that cuisine from another world would be so tasty."(elf)

"The Sashimi is pretty as well, you know?"

"……Is that supposed to be eaten raw?"

"Well, yeah. If we had wasabi to go with it, it would have been perfect though."

"I don't really get it but if you say so, whatever."

Looks like he really has no intention of trying it. For Feirona who lived in the forest, marine eatables like this in itself would be rare. He didn't even try out the fried ones made of minced fish meat either.

While giving a wry smile as I extended my chopsticks towards the sahsimi, Ms Francesca and SOlnea also extended theirs towards it.

"Oh."

"What is it?"

"No, nothing."

These two didn't seem to show much disapproval towards the Sashimi. Maybe they're just trying it out since I was eating it. Ms Francesca used her fork to cut it and Solnea clumsily, while shaking, used her chopstick to put some on her small plate.

"Where I lived, Sashimi is considered a high-class item you

know?"(renji)

"Really?"(fran)

"Because eaten raw after all. Since the degree of freshness mattered greatly, various troublesome methods had to be used to keep it fresh apparently."

"Various methods?"(fran)

"Yup, various methods."

Saying that, I quickly took a bite to cut the topic. I know I was the one started the topic but I am completely unaware of everything else about it myself. And also, it'd be difficult for them to understand even if I talked about my world. I'd rather not confuse them too much. That was a failure at starting a conversation. And, to be honest, for a high class item, I could quite easily get it even with my poor lifestyle.

Since Solnea had not been told of my circumstances as of yet, I felt that it'd be troublesome to speak of that in front of her. But even that won't last for that long. It's not like I'm going to have to take care of her forever either.

"But still, you sure performed great Miss Francesca."(renji)

"Yes?"

"The prelims. To be honest, I didn't think you would be able to fight that well."

"……he even said that you'd lose, at first."(mururu)

Please shut up, Mururu.

And sure enough, Ms Francesca's expression completely froze. I cleared my throat and took a sip from my tea.

"Congratulations. It could be that we'd end up fighting each other in the main tournament as well."(renji)

"Eh?"

"No, well, I'm also taking part in the main battle so there's a chance

right?”

“Uu, ah……really?”

“Well, kind of.”

“You’re such a bully, you know?”(elf)

I simply shrugged my shoulders at Feirona’s words. My opponent has been decided as Souichi already though. But I’m the only one who knows that. So I’m allowed to tease her a little, right? Maybe I’m just a bit sad that she grew up so much without me knowing.

And by the way, I truly am happy for her victory. As someone who knew what Ms Francesca was like back then, I’m really happy to see so much growth in her in the matter of few months.

“Even though when we first met, you were about to get killed by a few goblins..”(renji)

“You still remember that……”

“I doubt I could forget that.”

As I laughed saying that, she hung her head in embarrassment. That gesture of hers alone hasn’t changed at all since we first met.

Trying to subjugate goblins even though she had no experience, got close to dying and then wailing and crying afterwards. And that girl was now able enough to take part in the main rounds of the tournament. I don’t know how far she’d be able to get but I hope she gives her most satisfactory performance.

“How was she back then?” (mururu)

“Well even though I say it like that, it was not that long ago. I know her since after I saved her from goblins that had attacked her.”(renji)

“Oh.”(elf)

“That was really dangerous, if I had not saved her in time, she really would have died right there.”(renji)

“Yes……for that time, once again, thank you very much. If Renji-sama

had not saved me who knows what would have happened……"(fran)

"No, you don't have to so seriously thank me again now, you know…"

"No, if not for Renji-sama I would have never even fulfilled my dream of appearing the Fighting tournament's main round."

I was just joking around when I spoke of that time you know? But it seems the fear she felt back then is still strongly rooted in Ms Francesca. Well, it's thanks to that she is able to give her best now without being reckless and putting herself in danger now though. Even after becoming able to fight monsters near the capital and even after entering the main round of the fighting tournament, she has not gotten conceited yet. You could say that she's maturing in a very good way.

"Also, you should be thanking Feirona for helping you win rather than me."(renji)

It feels weird to say this myself but, I did absolutely nothing that would have helped her win to be honest. At most, the only thing I've ever taught her is to use that pitfall magic back when we were facing those orcs. And a bit of common knowledge about being an adventurer and basic monsters, that's all.

I never even taught her how to swing a sword, let alone how to fight. That's why I think that saying something like 'if not for me' doesn't suit the situation.

"Both me and Mururu as well, only taught her how to always be cautious during battle. As for her sword use, she learnt simply by watching."(elf)

"Sword……you mean me?(renji)

"Umm, yes."(fran)

Feirona uses his bow more than his sword, and Mururu uses her own body as a weapon. Thus, if Ms Francesca had learned sword fighting by just watching, it'd have to be me. Now I feel a bit embarrassed.

But still…..I recalled Ms Francesca's fight in the colloseum. How should

I say this, I actually have zero confidence that I'd be able to fight with as much splendour as she was. Even during her sword fight, she was able to use magic even during close combat. Though there was still roughness in her form, she still fought looking like a pretty good adventurer. With her appearance, I'm guessing she'd get really popular one day. As someone who's supposedly her model for sword fighting, I feel a bit sad or rather, pathetic instead.

I was, in fact, taught by O'brien-san as well but I don't use his sword style at all. His is an incredible one hit sure kill attack type whereas mine involves dealing fast, multiple weak attacks to deal damage. And Ms Francesca was an incredible sword that combined both sword skill and magic. None of us actually resemble each other's style at all.

"Did her style actually resemble mine?"(renji)

"Not at all."(mururu)

To make sure I asked Mururu and she gave an instant reply. I agree as well.

"That's what I thought as well. My sword is––"(renji)

"Renji's sword is far more skilful."(mururu)

–Not that splendorous. Before I could say that, Mururu cut my words.

"It's as Mururu-chan says....."(fran)

"You do get a passing mark in my opinion. What do you think, O great master?"(elf)

"Who the hell are you calling aster? I don't remember teaching the sword to anyone."(renji)

"....Uuu."

As Ms Francesca gave a groan, Mururu glared at me. You both sure are on good terms.While feeling a bit envious, I thought about how to answer that.

Or rather, I felt that she was already pretty amazing. At least, compared to my own sword skill in the first three months of learning, I didn't even

know what a sword stance truly was, I just swung the sword around in desperation. And no matter how much I learnt to swing it, in an actual battle, I could barely put it to use. As someone who knows that, I can tell how much effort Ms Francesca must have put in her training. What passing mark, I can only think of complimenting her greatly.

"In the first place, I don't feel that my sword is that skilful."(renji)

"Really?"

"My sword is still very clumsy and awkward. I just learnt it by desperately swinging the sword while fighting much stronger monsters. Though I have been taught the basics, it was only for one month."

Other than that, there were goblins, orcs, lizardmen, zombies, hawkmen, vampires and other humanoid enemies and also treants, Garm, golems, chimaeras, dragons and other much crazy existences. And after fighting those, trying to keep myself alive, I kept on swinging my sword and finally turned into what I am right now. It can't be called skilful, it's still very clumsy. At least, I think so.

But apparently my comrades consider it to be skilled. Certainly, I have cut through countless enemies of various types with it but still, it feels a bit embarrassing to be told that.

[fufufu.]

"I don't think the word 'skilled' suits me much."

As I said that while scratching my head, Ms Francesca and Mururu looked at me with a blank gaze. Feirona, seeing me troubled at their gazes, simply gave a smile. Only Solnea, looked at me with her usual expressionless face.

[You're being trusted a lot, eh?]

"Seriously."

I lacked confidence even in the words I replied to Ermenhilde. True, I experienced an extremely dangerous journey of going and killing the Demon God and lived. I grew more than any adventurer possibly could I

think. It's not a game or manga but fighting stronger people, experience from the journey, they're all one of my few strengths.

And it was the same as Ms Francesca. She experienced dangers and journeys, normal newbie adventurers would never get to take. A descendant of the Demon God, ambush from a Demon, the encounter in the forest of rotting souls. It was enough experience to completely change someone.

"Well, I'm happy that you watched my sword."(renji)

"Eh?"(fran)

"Really. You've grown so much from the time we met."

"Mouu, please enough of that!"

Hahahaha. I didn't want myself to be the only one getting all embarrassed so I decided to involve Ms Francesca as well. Recalling the Ms Francesca back then, and her crying face after almost dying to goblins, my heart felt lighter. Aah, this calms me.

[You're really such a bully/mean guy.]

Isn't that normal for me?

As I teased Ms Francesca while eating the Surimi (T/N: minced fish.) , Feirona and Mururu gave small laughs. Probably, they have already noticed my embarrassment as well. Am I that easy to understand?

"So, is the Surimi tasty?"(renji)

"It's weird. It does get tasty as I continue to bite."(mururu)

"haha, that's certainly weird."

It must be a new texture of food for her, as Mururu made a complex face while eating. When I laughed looking at her face, I got kicked beneath the table. The kick didn't have any strength to it so it doesn't hurt at all though.

[What the hell are you guys doing?]

".....messing around?"(renji)

“What is it?”(mururu)

“It’s nothing.”

As I gave an answer to Erenhilde, Mururu reacted to it so I just gave a vague reply to it. Ms francesca happily looked at us, having this usual kind of conversation. Mururu must have realized that I was talking to Ermenhilde. Recently, her senses about it have gotten even sharper.

And in the end, the atmosphere remained as usual as we talked and laughed, rather than making it feel like an actual victory celebration, as we finished eating. Well, it was mostly Mururu who was eating though. Solnea seemed to be quite the big eater as well but was still no match for Mururu. That said, Solnea still ate many times more than Ms Francesca.

As we paid the bill and left the building, I shivered from the cold air in the empty alley. I should probably go and greet Toudou as well but I’d feel bad making others wait for me so I decided not to. Well, I can meet anytime I want later after all, so it’s fine.

“The main round of the tournament will start soon. Think you can win?”(elf)

“No way. That said, I do intend to actually make an effort this time.”(renji)

“Oh?

“Well, I’m not gonna win with just that though.”

The women had already started walking as me and Feirona walked behind them when he asked me that.

I have zero confidence for winning. I doubt I’d actually win against Souichi. But I am hoping to at least give him a bit of challenge.

If, my opponent in the first round wasn’t Souichi, I wonder how far I could go in the tournament. I wonder how close I could come to winning. I quickly shook my head. There’s no use thinking about that. The world wasn’t easy enough where you could win just by putting a little bit of effort. In the first place, that would be rude to those who genuinely are

working hard for the tournament.

“Your face looks better.”(elf)

“It’s the same normal face as I always had though?”(renji)

“Don’t you think so as well?”(elf)

[That’s true. Not bad——it’s the face I like.]

At just that, my heartbeat rose instantly. To Ermenhilde it was just a trivial thing to say but that voice, and those words, it’s not fair.

I don’t think I let it show in my expression but my gaze swam away for a second. The sharp sighted elf walking beside me wasn’t going to miss that. He didn’t say anything but I could see his shoulders very slightly shake from stifled laughter. I gave a sideway glare at him but only got ignored. Goddamnit!

[What happened?]

“Nothing at all.”

[??]

I answered in a rude way but I can’t help it that I got embarrassed. I don’t want anyone to see me like this.

“You’re truly unusual, Renji.”(elf)

“.....in what way?”

Due to that, I replied to Feirona in a somewhat strong voice as well. But without paying any attention to that, Feirona continued.

“You’re not like a hero at all.”(elf)

“Well, I’m not suited to be one after all.”

I gave a standard reply to him.

Hero.

I’m not suited to be one. I know that better than anyone else.

“To you, what is a true Hero like?”(elf)

“Well.....A hero is hope for everyone. They answer to the wishes and prayers of the people. Even in despair they look forward and for the world, for the people, for anyone, for the greater good, they give their best. And above all, you don’t call yourself a hero, you’re named one by others.”

“fumu. That is certainly one form of a hero.”

His reply was very light. He wasn’t disregarding my opinion but wasn’t accepting it either. That’s how it felt.

“Then, in your opinion what’s a hero like?”(renji)

“Someone who is trusted by all, and someone who can accept that trust.”

His straight gaze was so strong that I averted my eyes as if running away.

Trust.

Those were words far too heavy for me. Aya and the others put their trust on me. We travelled together, trusted each other, and thought well of me. Even I know that. And even now they trust me like before. And even though I find it heavy, I still get spoiled by them.

But still. But still I——above those people that came from my own world and were like family to me, I chose Eru above them all. I ended up choosing to protect my promise to her.

.

Even though Eru was no more.

.

“Feirona.....”

“You’re making a good face right now, Renji.”

“.....”

I shut my mouth at those words. I wanted to ask, how? But I didn’t.

Even though I chose Eru, I am trying to answer to Aya and everyone else’s feelings.

It's all so confusing I feel like I'll go crazy.

"When we first met, I thought of you as a guy with no willpower and someone who hated trouble above all. But right now, you're looking ahead."(elf)

"If I don't, I'll fall over and injure myself after all."

I answered to him with light talk but he didn't seem to get angry.

"That's right, if you don't look ahead, you'll stumble and hurt yourself one day."(elf)

He simply said that back to me. In a very light and calm voice. It entered directly inside my chest.

Was choosing Eru an 'injury'?

Was my wish to Astraera a 'stumble'?

No. It wasn't. I shouted that inside my heart but couldn't say it out loud.

Aah, I don't know anymore.

"I said this in the afternoon as well. To see hard work not bear fruit is an extremely painful thing."(elf)

"Yeah, you did."

"Don't let Francesca's hard work/perseverance go to waste. It's fine if you are not a Hero. It's true that maybe you really aren't suited to be a hero."

Looking in front, I saw Miss Francesca and the others standing and waiting for us.

"But right now, you are that girl's objective/goal. Not the world or anyone else's, but at least answer her trust in you. I think you can bear at least one, right?"(elf)

This was, just like then——it's similar to my choice when I killed the Demon God.

I chose only one.

Not the world, not my comrades, not everyone.....I chose Eru.

It wasn't a mistake. True, I am still enjoying my life.

".....Well, I..."(renji)

Looking ahead, I saw my current comrades.

I looked beside me, I saw a meddlesome comrade of mine.

I put my hand in my pocket. There was my partner who had now changed from back then.

"I'll try my best."(renji)

"And that's fine."(elf)

My answer was short, so was his reply.

That much is fine, right? Maybe I tend to overthink things too much. I'm not sure though.

"Say, Feirona."(renji)

"What?"

"How old are you?"

"By human calculation.....around 150 maybe?"

"I see."

I guess from his point of view, I'm nothing more than a child. Just those words alone made my heart feel lighter.

"Say, Renji."(elf)

"What?"

"We don't expect you to act like a hero in front of us, okay?"

".....I see."

This guy actually might be an Esper as well.

I could only think of something like that to change my mood.

[.....]

Inside my pocket, I gently caressed Ermenhilde. But I received no reply.

Chapter 45: That Sword

Aah, this is a dream.

While faced with the despairing tragedy in front of me, someone muttered that.

.

.

Haa haah, while breathing heavily, I ran through the stone corridor with all strength. I wanted to plug my ears to avoid the roars and screams coming at me from all directions but my right hand was supporting Souichi-kun, who I was carrying on my shoulders, and my left hand was pulling Hiyuu-chan as I ran, so both my hands were not free. Souichi-kun had lost consciousness and so felt very heavy. But this wasn't the time to be complaining. From behind, a monster, who felt like [death] itself, was chasing us. I ran past many soldiers who were rushing towards where we came from, towards the monster. Seeing as they didn't even have the time to notice us fully showed just how abnormal this situation was. Their iron armor that hit me as they passed in a rush really hurt.

O'brien-san and others said that they'd hold it back but I doubt they'd win against that monster. Even Souichi-kun, the strongest among us summoned 13, lost consciousness in few seconds. If O'brien-san and the others had not let us run, only the worst case scenario was waiting for us. And even though O'brien-san is still at the training field fighting and holding back those monsters.....here I was pathetically running away along while pulling Hiyuu-chan with me. Even though we had been summoned exactly to help in such a situation.

No, so what if we have received some super strength, without experience it doesn't change one damn thing. No matter how incredible the power we get, we're still only amateurs. Our bodies froze just looking at some heavily injured people, and would faint if we saw a corpse.

"O, onii-chan!"(T/N: onii-chan is used by younger children to refer to older boys even when not actually family btw.)

Hiyuu-chan called me. But without even answering her, I ran desperately while pulling her small hand. Even though the sky visible from the windows was clear enough that it could blind you, why the hell did something like this had to happen? I wanted to just escape it all in front of this sudden calamity but I shook my head and tried to calm myself. No need to waste energy on thinking, just run! Run, as far as possible. If this goes on, we'll all be annihilated. I gripped Hiyuu-chan's hand tighter. At the very least, I have to save at least this small girl.

"It'll be fine. O'brien-san and the others will take care of something like that in no time, don't worry."(renji)

"Uu, n....."

I said that but Hiyuu-chan's expression remained poor. It's only to be expected. If this goes on.....no, the castle is already doomed. Even a child can figure that out. That's how much the difference in abilities is.

The ones attacking the castle right now weren't those low class monsters like goblins or orcs that I had read in books. They were demons wearing incredible armor along with giant monsters. Among those, there were even giant chimaeras and golems that alone require tens of knights to defeat. But their numbers weren't just one or two either.

The surprise attack happened out of nowhere. I was just heading to the training field as usual to practice when the space distorted and monsters appeared out of nothingness. It'd be weird if we could deal with something like that. Souichi-kun who just happened to be with me tried to deal with them but only to end up carried away on my shoulders. No matter how strong of a divine protection of the goddess he had received, Souichi-kun was a middle school student till only a few days ago. There's no way he'd be able to deal with something like being suddenly surrounded by a vortex of death. As a result, I had no choice but to carry him and pull Hiyuu-chan and run away.

I wonder if Utano-san and the others are safe. I had no way of checking but I can atleast hope they are.

I wonder how far had I run away. Finding the giant door I had become

familiar with, I quickly entered inside.

The cathedral. Normally the place was tranquil and peaceful but right now it was filled with people. Injured soldiers and knights. Priests trying to heal as many as they could.

It was truly like the scene from a battlefield you only saw in movies. In front of such a scene, I could only stand in a daze. My body lacked strength. My mind didn't work. The smell of blood and cries of pain felt disgusting. This was reality, I just couldn't accept that.

But, there was a small hand that pulled mine.

"Are……are you…okay?"

It was Hiyuu-chan. The one who brought me back to senses was this small girl with eyes filled with anxiety and unease.

Aah, that's right. I can't lose my calm right now. I am the one who's holding this girl's hand. How could I be the one being anxious instead?

"Hiyuu-chan, let's take some rest."

Closing the great door, I spoke that to her. Handing over Souichi-kun to one of the Priests that came worried towards us as we entered, I headed deep inside with Hiyuu-chan. As I searched for a place to sit in the floor filled with towels, blankets, and medical tools and items, I my chest tighten.

Even though I was summoned to fight, I ran away like this. That fact struck me like a thorn. At the deepest part of the cathedral was the silver statue of the goddess and some of the priests were praying to her. But she won't answer those prayers. She wasn't even in this world and simply watched over this world from a different place……probably.

Near that statue, seeing an empty couch, I sat down. Hiyuu-chan sat down beside me as well. Since the longsword on back was an obstruction, I threw it on the ground making a clanking sound. Looking beside me, towards Hiyuu-chan, her white hair, typical to albinos, were sticking to her face from sweat and she was panting fast for breath. We ran so much that even I, an adult, was tired, I can only imagine how much stamina she

must have consumed. Realizing that I didn't even think about her well being while running, I only felt more miserable.

"Are you....okay?"(yui)

"Yeah, you, Hiyuu-chan?"

".....I'm alright...as well."

Just from those small words, I felt my heart lighten a bit. But still, my head hurts thinking about what to do next.

So many monsters had invaded. It's clear that all of them must be subjugated. But, we lack the power to do so. People, strength, we're lacking in all of it. Even leaving me aside, the most essential in battle, i.e. Souichi-kun is currently unconscious. And we don't even know where everybody else is among this chaos and confusion. For people summoned to save this world, we are not being of use at all. In fact, we are the ones getting protected by the people of this world instead.

And as we waste time, injured would increase in number, and so would the dead––

If this what everyday was like in this world, I'll break. Who even thought of this? We knew it was impossible for just some humans to save the world. Let alone fighting experience I hadn't even held a sword before coming to this world.

"Onii-chan.....what do we do?"

"Ah, yeah....."

That's right, I don't have the time to be making excuses inside my mind. Both me and Hiyuu-chan have super abilities granted to us by the Goddess. Thinking of that, I brought out the medal kept inside my pocket. It's just a gold medal. It's designed differently from the gold coins used in this world but that's it. It can't be used to buy something neither does it hold any special value as an antique. I got it from the Goddess but it lacks any authenticity. What can I do with just a medal.

Was I supposed to ask how to use it as well or is the Goddess actually

messing with me? Shit! I cursed and gripped the medal tightly but still nothing happened. In the first place, I have tried this many times already. I called to it to lend me strength many times but it was useless. Probably, I don't know how to use it. I can tell that. Even though I really needed its help right now, it was useless.

That's why, once more—-

"Oi....."

Just at that moment, the great door to the cathedral opened with a great noise. No, it'd be better to say that it exploded. The double doors blew away and its fragments hit the injured and stopped only when it hit the wall.

Due to this sudden occurrence, the cathedral returned to silence. But that only lasted for a second.

First, screams rose. Screams and shrieks of despair reached my ears. The Priests ran here and there looking for a way to escape as the soldiers and knights who could move picked their weapons. And only then, finally, I was able to look at the place where the gate was as well. What had appeared was a black demon. No something similar to a demon. I had yet to see an actual demon but I had read about them in books so I was somewhat aware of what they looked like. But the demon that had appeared had many differences from what I had read.

2 legs, 2 arms and a head. Appearance similar to a human was the main characteristic of a demon but its whole body was currently covered in crustacean like armour, and the 4 compound eyes on its head were releasing a red light. And above all, it's mouth wasn't small at all like a human. It opened sideways like a true insect. It was completely different than a human or a demon.

It's whole body was protected by magical energy. It didn't even wear armour like humans or normal demons did. It was completely different from anything I had read about in the books.

"Hiiii!!"

“That thing!”

I remembered that demon. It’s the one that was standing at the very front of the ones that attacked us at the training grounds. And also the one that made Souichi faint with one attack.

Even though O’brien-san and others tried to hold it back, it’s no standing here. Realizing what that meant, I quickly shook my head. Think, about the situation at hand first!

But while looking at the Priests running away, and the injured lying around, my body refused to move. Was this fear, or something even deeper? Unable to even move my gaze, I looked at the demon. And for some reason, it felt like that that demon’s compound eyes were——— looking at me.

Next instant, the knight rushed towards the demon with their weapons. Three of them. Due to the injured lying around and the couches in the cathedral, it was impossible for too many to fight at once.

But before the knights could even attack it, the demon pointed its right arm towards the knights. And with just the swing of the its arm, blood sprayed in the air. As if the shadow held its own will, it matched the movement of the demon’s arm and cut the knights apart.

It was not just blood that flew. Flesh——limbs, torso, cut apart armour, all flew in the air.

In a panic, I blocked Hiyuu-chan’s eyes with my hand, but I was too slow. As if she had lost all strength, her body limped towards me. She had fainted.

“Hiyuu-chan!?!”

Flustered, I called her name but got no reaction. The next moment, the arm of the demon swung again. Once again, screams rose and blood spilled. While hearing the wails and death cries of the knights, I picked up my sword lying on the ground. And by the time, I drew my sword, only us and the priests who had run till the end of the cathedral were alive. Every knight and soldier that challenged the demon were now lying in a

pool of blood. Nobody was moving. The smell of blood and the scene in front of me made me feel like vomiting what I ate in the morning but somehow I resisted to and walked top the centre of the cathedral with my sword in hand. It's not like I had come up with some plan. In my head, I knew that it was suicide to challenge this monster even Souichi couldn't beat.

But still, I stood there. The demon took a step forward. It stepped on the pool of blood, splash I felt like I heard such a sound.

My tip of the sword was shivering from fear, but I couldn't help it. The existence in front of me was simply too scary. I didn't even think of something like 'I must fight it', 'I must stop it'. My body simply moved by instinct. Most probably, it was the same for the other soldiers and knights as well.

While raising a shout that hurt my throat, I slashed towards the demon. Was it thanks to O'brien-san's training or was it just a miracle that I was able to react in time? The moment that demon swung his arm, I bent over and dodged the shadow's attack. Slipping over the pool of blood I swung my sword as it hit its head and made sparks fly. Rather than calling it just hard, it felt like I just hit something giant gigantic and tough something. The demon showed absolutely no reaction to being hit by the sword either. Let alone back away, it didn't even move a single bit.

"uu, ah."

Instead, I ended up taking a step back. Maybe it lost interest in me, it simply ignored me and walked past me. Even though it wasn't any taller than me in size, the pressure it gave off was in a whole different level. splash splash as it walked it spoiled the beautiful carpet and couches around. It's destination was——the unconscious Hiyuu-chan and Souichi-kun who was still receiving treatment.

The moment I realized that, I ran so fast that I surprised myself. I slashed it once more from behind. clank with a shrill sound, my hand numbed from the impact. But still, the demon didn't stop moving. Once more! But it still didn't stop. Twice, thrice, I continued but——it just didn't

stop. At last, maybe because I continued hitting hit, I became unable to hold the sword and it dropped out of my hand.

Then, finally, the demon stopped moving and looked at me with its compound eyes. The next instant, I got blown away. For a second, I felt gravity disappear, and suddenly I hit one of the couches and the fell down to the ground with incredible force. I don't even know what happened to me. From the centre of the cathedral, I had been blown away almost to the gate.. It actually took me time to realize how far I had been blown. Maybe because I had rolled over the pool of blood and entrails, the pungent smell of it all struck my nose. I felt like vomiting again but somehow, I held it back.

"gu, ahh"

"I couldn't breathe properly. Did I break some of my bones was I just hurt badly. Feeling pain I had never felt before, I even forgot how to breathe. My chest hurt. Was I punched? Or was I kicked? Or did it use magic on me? While in confusion, I rolled up trying to bear with the pain.

Giving a single glance at me, the demon's gaze turned back––towards Hiyuu-chan.

"Ah."

A lifeless voice came out of me.

The priests had gathered at the very end of the cathedral, shivering in fear and the knights had all been killed. There was no one to save her. No. one. At. All.

"No.."

I stretched my hand. There was no meaning. Above all, I was still lying near the gate in the pool of blood and the demon was in the centre of the cathedral. Even the distance was despairingly big.

In panic, I tried to stand up only to slip in the blood and fall back. My hand touched the hand of someone lying in front of me. It was only a wrist lying there. There were others, parts of the body, entrails, heads with eyes wide in despair, heads with still there helmet on.....I was

surrounded by parts of flesh.

“uug.”

I threw up. Vomiting everything I had eaten today but still unable to stop, I vomited my gastric juices. The acid burnt my throat and tears came out from the pain.

——But, I stood up. Did my sense of pain get paralyzed from vomiting too much, or maybe my mind has gone crazy by being surrounded by entrails and body parts? The sharp pain in my chest turned dull. I wiped my mouth only to taste and smell blood. I was lying in a pool of blood. Even my arms hands have been stained completely. No, my whole body has been stained in blood.

“Let’s do this.”

I said that to myself. Saying that, I hardened my resolve. My surroundings was overflowing with death, my senses have gone mad. Even though I can never match this monster, it’s crazy that I still stood up.

Holding back the dully paining chest with my left arm, I picked up a sword from the hand of a soldier who was missing the rest of his body. I had lost my earlier sword after all. My hand, and legs were stiffer than I thought. But still——if I didn’t move now, it’ll be Hiyuu-chan and Souichi-kun who’d become a part of this pool of blood next.

Hearing me, the black demon stopped. And slowly, with ease, he turned to look at me over its shoulders. It’s red eyes looked at me and that alone made my body shrink with fear as if my heart had been gripped directly. But still, I pointed the sword at that demon. I must have looked amusing as I stood like that shivering with my sword.

And, as if sneering at me, it turned completely towards me.

What?

Is its aim not Hiyuu-chan and Souichi? I became suspicious but I’m glad that it stopped moving at least. Now all that’s left is——all that’s left is……

What should I do next? Should I fight this monster? It defeated Souichi,

broke through O'brien-san and others. Should I fight this monster, the one that created this tragic situation?

It's useless. You can't win.

Someone whispered that.

The next corpse will only change from the kids to yours, that's all.

Someone whispered again.

Run away.

Again.

Run away.

It's voice became louder.

Run away.

My shivering sword slightly lowered.

Run away.

But still, I tightly gripped the sword.

Run away.

"Your opponent is right here, motherfucker!!"

While shouting in voice so loud that I surprised myself, I ran towards it.

I slashed at it with all my strength but was unable to even hit it, let alone scratch its armour. It simply dodged me by taking just a step back. Hitting the floor instead, my hand went numb but I used all my strength to continue the attack with a rising reverse slash. But once again, my attack was dodged just by taking a step back.

gichi It's bug-like mouth made a sound.

It was laughing.

The moment I understood that, I rammed myself at it to break its stance. If my sword won't hit, I just need to create a situation where I won't miss. But I was unable to do that, in fact, it only ended with my left shoulder hurting. The demon didn't even budge an inch. It felt as if I had

just rammed into a huge rock.

The next moment, it grabbed me by my chest with one hand and lifted me up. Floating in the air, I tried struggling against its one arm grabbing me but it didn't flinch at all. I was lifted up till I was looking down at it right now. And then, it threw me away like it was nothing.

Thrown directly at the foot of the silver statue of the goddess, my back hit the hard stone and I lost my breath. And at the same time, screams rose again. It must be the priests inside the cathedral. My vision swayed from the pain as I used my both hands to lift my face up.

Calmly, the black demon walked slowly towards me. I tried to pick up my sword but it wasn't beside me anymore. I must have let go of it when I was thrown away.

".....Shit."

Even my words lacked strength now. My body seemed to have lost its energy as well.

Why did it end up like this? We were summoned to save this world by the goddess. Is the conclusion to the reality of that fairy tale like situation supposed to be this painful? As I lay my body on the soft carpet, my eyelids seemed to get heavier. If I just closed my eyes right now, I'll be at peace. The fear would disappear. Without feeling any sort of pain or fear, dying while in sleep is——-

"—Not okay in any goddamn way!!"

I raised my head with vigour. The black demon was.....still standing in the same place as before. I didn't hear the voices of the Priests crying for help or the voices of agony of the injured anymore either.

It was looking directly behind me——

"ahn?"

Tracing its gaze, I turned to look back as well. My whole body pained just from turning my body but I felt like I could forget about that pain as well. There, the beautiful, silver statue of the goddess.....was for some

reason, shining. It's radiance felt divine, and warm. My heart that had been shivering with fear felt like it was being warmed up by that light. Just looking at it made the despair inside me go away.

I know this light. I recall seeing it. I recall feeling it.———The Goddess, Astraera.

It's the light that filled the space where I first met her, it's the aura she gave off. The warm light coming from the silver statue—-the magical energy, was the same as the one released by the goddess.

"wha.....What's going on?"

Pain disappeared from my body. No, not just pain, the blood that stained my whole body was cleaned away and disappeared becoming pale light.

I wonder if that took a moment, or a few seconds or even longer. As I kept on dazedly looking at the statue, before I realized, a woman with golden hair was standing beside me. Enveloped in the light of magical energy, as if she had been blessed by the Goddess, or as if she served the Goddess herself, she stood beside me.

That scene looked so fantastical, and beautiful. She was like those holy women or princesses that appear in fairy tales. It made me completely forget even the smell of blood permeating the whole cathedral.....that woman was pure, holy, and simply beautiful.

Her gaze turned.....and looked at me. She had almost cold-like jade green eyes, golden hair that looked like they were made of silk and a pure white dress that seemed to almost reflect and dance with the sunlight coming from the window. Her hair seemed to have been tied up properly yet seemed long and it fluttered in the torrent of magical energy coming from the statue. She took one step forward. With a shururi sound her long dress slid on the carpet. The sound of it clearly reached my ears.

"Are you alright, Renji-sama?"

She spoke to me. That voice felt, like a boy yet like that of a woman's, almost androgynous and felt good to listen to. The owner of that voice kneeled beside me as if she didn't even give a care about the demon.

“Now, please stand up.”

She gave me her hand. Somehow, without hesitation—-I took her hand. If I stand up I’ll have to fight that black demon once again. A monster that seemed like the embodiment of despair itself. There was no chance of victory. Even though I knew all that, I stood up without hesitation.

Her hand was small. Soft, pretty, a woman’s hand. Yet, it held strength.

——And that strength, was my [power].

Her cold eyes narrowed while looking at me. For a second, her expression changed to that of a gentle smile. But, only for a second. It soon became rigid again. And then, she looked at the black demon.

For some reason, the demon had still not moved even a single step after the statue began shining. It was as if——it was waiting for me to stand up.

“Let’s go, Renji-sama.”

“.....ye..yeah.”

Finally, gichigichi a sound came.

That grating sound came from the mouth of that demon. It was laughing. I got goosebumps looking at the demon laughing like that.

We faced each other. Inside this cathedral, that was supposed to be peaceful, while being looked over by the statue of the goddess.

The whole cathedral shook greatly. Someone out there must have used a very strong magic.

At that moment, the golden haired woman disappeared and turned to jade coloured particles of light. I became surprised but it soon changed to exaltation. Power rose inside me. I wonder if this power is what magical energy feels like. A power that others had yet I didn’t. this must be it.

The woman, who had appeared suddenly, had no disappeared and that light concentrated in my hand.....and became one sword. It’s blade was jade green, the handle and decorations were in gold. As I swung that feather-like light sword towards an empty couch, it tore into two without any resistance. My face cramped at the sharpness of the sword. It was

completely different from the swords I had used in the training ground whether in terms of weight, sharpness, in basically everything.

gichii the black demon laughed again. It's legs finally moved——towards, me.

I looked at the sword in my hand. It's gem-like beautiful blade might look like it was weak but I felt that it was strong. I put strength in the hand holding the sword.

I recalled that that woman's eyes were also similarly jade green in colour. The gold of the handle as well, was the same colour as her hair. When I realized that, it felt like the sword in my hand was that girl herself.

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As I opened my eyes, a familiar face came into my view looking closely at me.

".....what are you doing Anastasia."(renji)

"Hmm. Observing?"(ana)

"You're heavy."

"I am not!?!"

Considering what to do about this doll-sized fairy sitting on me for a second, I gave up and rose up and she rolled down and fell off the bed. She seemed to be complaining something but, it was your own fault you know?

As I thought, I was just dreaming and I was back in the room I had been given in the castle. The furniture set in my room and the clear sky outside was still the same but there was no smoke rising and neither could I hear screams anymore.

It was the same peaceful world without the Demon God.

Will that be considered a good dream or a bad one? I couldn't decide. Should I feel nostalgic and happy about dreaming about Eru or should I be sad to have witnessed that many lives lost?

[Puhh.]

Suddenly, that voice resounded in my head.

Hearing the sudden spurt of laughter from the very familiar voice, I turned to look towards my pillow in confusion. There, the golden medal the exact same as from my dream was kept.

"Good Morning, Ermenhilde."

[Yeah. Looks like you had a good sleep, eh?]

"Well yeah, I had a good dream."

[Didn't seem like that to me though?]

But her enjoying voice suddenly went silent.

[You were making a lot of noise while sleeping, you know?]

"Because I had a good dream."

[Oi.]

"Well, that was probably because Anastasia was too heavy."

Saying that, I stood up from my bed.

Suddenly becoming curious about anastasia, I looked underneath the bed but she wasn't there anymore. While I was confused, I heard the sound of my window opening. It seems in the instant I looked below, she ran out of the room. To use the window, how very fairy-like.

I wonder what happened? Well her eccentricity isn't really a new thing but it's not like I'd get angry at her for sitting on my chest either. I became a bit curious seeing her run away like that.

"What's up with her?"(renji)

[Take a look at the mirror.]

While not understanding what Eremnhilde meant, I looked for a mirror. On looking, I understood what she meant.

"That son of a bitch."

[She's a girl though?]

"Who cares about that?!"

While replying to Ermenhilde's tsukkomi, I rubbed the scribbling on my face with my fingers. Since she had used ink, it spread on my face on rubbing.

Goddamn that prank loving fairy idiot. How could she.....

[It's Renji's fault for not waking up even though she kept on doing that.]

"Even if you say that.....you could have said something, at least."

[I tried waking you up but you didn't. haven't you grown a bit too relaxed?]

".....Maybe I have."

I had no excuse so I could only agree with a shrug. But still, what do I do about this face? My face was currently filed with scribbling and drawings. She must have been on my chest because she was doing this to me. Even though she's actually older than me, she's still so childish.

"Say, Ermenhilde?"

[What?]

"In my dream, did I say something?"

[Hm? No.....]

Unable to understand what I myself wanted to say, I scratched my head. I'm still half-asleep I guess. I thought of asking a maid to get some water to wash my face, but then again, I don't want to go out with this face either. What do I do?

[Renji.]

"What?"

While I was thinking about how to deal with the scribbling on my face, Ermenhilde spoke up with a meek voice.

Her voice was familiar.....the same as when she's worried about something.

[No, nevermind.]

"I see."

Should I pursue the topic right now?

I thought about it for a second but decided not to at the very end. If something was the matter, she'd ask me herself. While thinking of that, I changed my thoughts back to the problem at hand. Was I just running, or was this my trust in her?

It's probably the former, I think.

I had a dream. Not about Ermenhilde, but of Eru. That has happened many times before and not anything new. Eru died. And now I live with Ermenhilde.

It's just.....their voices are same. It's like talking to the same person but is actually completely different. I wanted forget about it. I end up treating and overlapping Ermenhilde with another person. That was, to me.....and to Ermenhilde as well, something very cruel. That's why, I was unable to ask Ermenhilde of her worries.

"What should I do with this face?"(renji)

[Just ask a maid to get you some water to wash it.]

"Yeah, I guess, but.."

It's going o be really embarrassing but I guess I can't help it. For the time being, I decided to make Anastasia's punishment 3 times harsher and looked for the bell to call a maid.

Since I barely use it, I had no idea where it was and it took a few minutes to find it. The bell was kept right at the centre of the table in the middle of the room. How the hell did I even miss that?

I called for the maid to fetch me some water but her face was more surprised rather than amused. Well, I guess seeing a man just woken up with scribbling on his face would surprise most rather than make them laugh?

Closing the window, I sat down on the bed. Picking up Ermenhilde from my pillow side, I caressed its edge.

[What happened?]

“No, just thinking how peaceful it is right now.”

[That’s great and all but it’s so uncool to say that with that face, you know?]

“Wha, well, I guess, you’re right.”

As I gave a laugh, Ermenhilde made a tired sigh.

This is fine. This mood is just fine.

[……how deplorable.]

“Don’t say that. It’s very like me, right?”

As if replying to me, a small laugh resounded in my head.

[Maybe it really is, I guess.]

And, she said that.

Credits

Translator: Shikkaku Translations

Epub: Estevam / dotNOVEL